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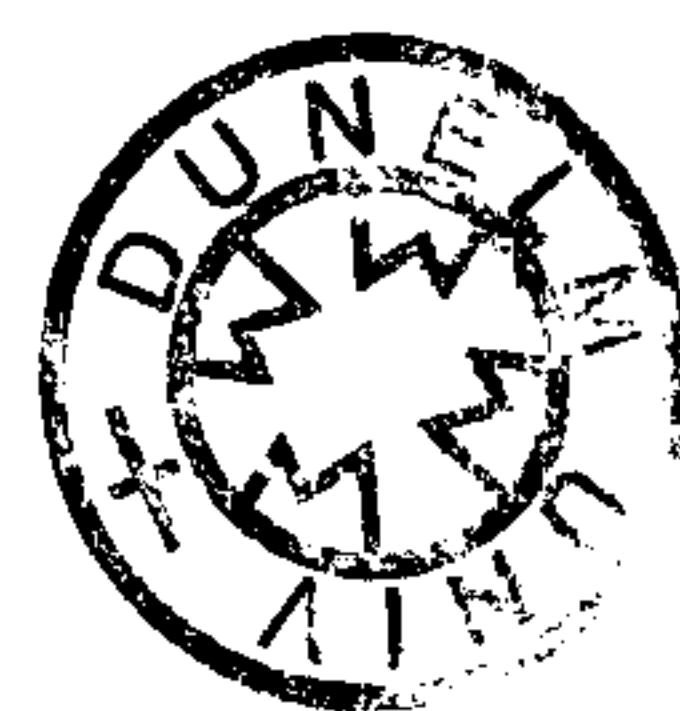
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# **Fashioning high quality public space: The 'urban renaissance' in Newcastle-Upon-Tyne and Gateshead**

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**Donna Marie Brown**



*A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy*

**Geography Department, University of Durham**

**July 2008**

**26 JUN 2009**

## Abstract

In recent years, politicians and urban managers have made an increasingly powerful case for improvements in the quality of contemporary urban public space. Linking the development of high quality public space to increases in social cohesion, economic competitiveness and citizens' quality of life, there would appear to be widespread agreement about the importance of making such improvements. However, there is considerably less agreement about how these can be achieved. This uncertainty is being reflected in what has become a lively and important debate in urban scholarship. A range of urban theorists have voiced concerns about the conceptual clarity with which the term 'public space' is deployed in both academic and policy literature, not least that different models of 'public space' are being mobilised by various actors and interest groups.

This thesis aims to examine the mechanisms and practices through which particular models of 'public space' are constructed in the contemporary design, regulation and management of towns and cities in England. It draws on and, where possible, advances debates on public space, urban renaissance and urban theory. In doing so, it deploys a multi-method qualitative research methodology to generate new empirical data capable of enlivening and contributing to investigations into the 'lived' dimension of everyday public space. This research takes an ethnographic approach to two case study sites: Newcastle—Upon-Tyne's gay village, The Pink Triangle, and the BALTIC contemporary art factory, Gateshead. The primary data generated from the two case study sites is not intended to be representative of all public spaces; however, some of the critical challenges raised through their investigation contribute to broader academic, popular and policy debates.

By synthesising primary findings from the empirical research with existing debates, this thesis argues that multiple understandings of the public/private divide continue to exert a strong influence upon the social and spatial structure of everyday life in the contemporary urban realm. Drawing on the work of Henri Lefebvre and more recent theorisations of space production, this thesis argues that to begin to confront the complexity of contemporary 'public space', the social construction and production of its 'public' and 'spatial' dimensions need to be more carefully considered. In developing a critical spatial framework capable of accounting for the everyday dynamics (re)producing 'public space', this thesis acknowledges the need to understand how it is perceived, conceived and lived in diverse and sometimes conflicting ways by its various designers, users, managers and regulators.



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## **Dedication**

This thesis is dedicated to the loving memory of my brother Paul Andrew Brown.

(From Riley Malone)

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## **Author's declaration**

**Declaration:** No part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree in this or any other University.

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

'The meanings that we attribute to space...are intimately tied up with our understandings of the world in which we live' (Unwin, 2000: 13).

### 1: Research Context

In recent years, public space has become the subject of increased critical attention and intense political debate. For many, it is the opportunities provided by the everyday physical spaces of the city to claim the 'right to the city' (Lefebvre, 1991) that has focussed their interest (Amin and Thrift, 2002; Lees, 2003; Low and Smith, 2006; ODPM, 2003). For others, it is the rapid privatisation and commodification of public space, and the resultant exclusionary pseudo-public spaces, which have raised increasing concern over its future (Goss, 1996; Zukin, 1996). Several scholars have begun to chart the changing nature and spatiality of public space, due to the alternative types of sociability facilitated through technological advances and the proliferation of online e-publics such as Facebook and MySpace (Sheller, 2004; Iveson, 2007). Others argue that truly 'public' space does not exist, and indeed never has existed, but remains a 'phantom' (Robbins, 1993). The burgeoning literature charting the position of public space within the contemporary urban realm is, however, predominantly characterised by notions of decline, degradation and loss. Just as the twentieth century witnessed the 'structural transformation' of the public sphere (Habermas, 1989) and the 'fall of public man' (Sennett, 1977), this millennium threatens the 'end of public space' (Mitchell, 1995).

As Low and Smith note:

This is a pivotal moment for examining public space... A creeping encroachment in previous years has in the last two decades become an epoch-making shift culminating in multiple closures, erasures, inundations and transfigurations of public space at the behest of state and corporate strategies. (2006: 1)





Discussions about the changing nature of public space transcend traditional disciplinary boundaries and actively involve academic, popular and policy circles. That a diverse range of stakeholders is engaged in disputes over the fate and future of public space pays testament to its centrality within everyday urban living. Public spaces, it would seem, are reflective of broader economic, social, cultural and political processes operating within our cities, their condition therefore affecting all citizens.

It is within the public spaces of the cities that *substantive* citizenship rights – that ‘array of civil, political, socio-economic, and cultural rights’ which are so constitutive of everyday life - can be exercised (Holston and Appadurai, 1996: 190). As Painter and Philo argue:

If people cannot be present in the public spaces (streets, squares, parks, cinemas, churches, town halls) without feeling uncomfortable, victimised and basically ‘out of place’, then it must be questionable whether or not these people are citizens at all; or, at least, whether they will regard themselves as full citizens on an equal footing with other people who seem perfectly ‘at home’ when moving about in public space. (1995: 115)

Acting as the setting - and often the stake - of social and spatial inclusion in society, the rapid changes in the form and function of contemporary urban public space have placed it firmly back on the research agenda.

Recent years have seen an increasingly powerful case being made for improvements in the quality of everyday urban public spaces and this has been articulated in a variety of important policy related contexts, such as the Urban Taskforce’s *Towards an Urban Renaissance* (DETR, 1999) and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister’s (ODPM) White Paper on *Sustainable Communities* (ODPM, 2003). This latter document announced the formation of CABE (Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment) Space, which is to ‘champion high quality planning, design, and the management and care of parks and public spaces, and will provide hands-on support to local authorities and others to apply best practice to improve the local environment and reduce fear of crime’ (CABE, 2003). Ever since its election into power in 1997, New Labour has brought government policy into line with the view held by many



academics: that public spaces are central to the creation of 'democratic urbanism' (Amin, 2006; Borden, 2001; Mitchell, 2003).

There would appear to be widespread agreement about the importance of making improvements to public space. There is, however, considerably less agreement about how these improvements can be achieved and what they might entail. This uncertainty is being reflected in what has become a lively and important debate in contemporary urban scholarship. A range of urban theorists have voiced concerns about the conceptual clarity and integrity with which the term 'public space' is deployed in both policy and academic literature, not least in that different models of 'public space' are being mobilised by different actors and interest groups (Light and Smith, 1998; Weintraub and Kumar, 1997). These models are often premised on incompatible assumptions, making their portability across different realms highly questionable (Iveson, 1998). In this regard, fashioning high quality public space from the various models on offer leaves policy practitioners confronting a range of critical challenges in the design, management and regulation of public space.

Iveson (2001) argues that despite the numerous models of public space used in the multiple discourses within which they circulate, it can be broadly characterised in four ways (see Table 1). Whilst Iveson's four models are helpful in providing an overview of some of the key ways that public space is understood, such divisions do not capture the true complexity of its many theorisations. Within contemporary understandings of public space, these four models - and their fundamental characteristics - do not exist in isolation, but are instead often casually and unreflexively blended and expanded upon (Dimendberg, 1998). At a time when 'public space' is being increasingly promoted in government policy, amidst the proliferating conceptual confusion over what it actually is, and discussion about what it can or indeed should be, this thesis is well positioned to bring some clarity to contemporary debates about urban public space.



**Table 1: Iveson's four models of public space:**

**The symbolic model:** The symbolic model is clearly illustrated in the work of Davis (1994), whereby it is revealed as having a vital role to play in contributing to a spatial and visual urban order which symbolises the nation and its interests – an order which should have its ultimate expression in the metropolis. There is an assumed association between public space which symbolically represents the common interest through state planning, and public space which fosters political participation and citizenship.

**The communitarian model:** This model advocates an 'urban village' drawing on the Chicago School's desire to promote 'shared community values'. Prescriptions for public space informed by the urban village model have argued that there is an intimate connection between density, sociability and security. It is within these public spaces that common values and collective support can be produced by people 'rubbing together more closely' (Sennett, 1989).

**The cosmopolitan model:** Drawing on the work of Jacobs (1961), this model prescribes density and *diversity* in public space. Public space ought to be informed by a cosmopolitan ethic of sociability and tolerance, in a world of cultural and ethnic diversity in which people encounter each other as strangers.

**Republican model:** Drawing on the work of Habermas (1989), the essential function of public space relates to its role as a venue where the 'right to the city can be enacted'. Public space is viewed as a place where citizens can exercise a degree of 'republican virtue' through participation in the affairs of the public.

(2001: 30)

### 1.1: Thesis Aims and Objectives

This thesis aims to identify and examine the mechanisms and practices through which particular models of urban 'public' space are constructed in the contemporary design and management of towns and cities in England. It draws on and, where possible, advances debates on public space, urban renaissance and urban theory. In doing so, it deploys a multi-method qualitative research methodology, to generate new primary empirical data capable of enlivening and contributing to investigations into the physical, ideational, symbolic, conceptual and lived dimensions of public space. Whilst the two case study sites studied in this thesis - BALTIC contemporary art factory, Gateshead and Newcastle-Upon-Tyne's gay village, the Pink Triangle - are not intended to be representative of all public spaces, some of the critical challenges raised through their investigation can contribute to broader academic, popular and policy debates.



By synthesising primary findings from the empirical research with existing debates, this thesis aims to develop a critical spatial framework that can be used to more fully understand the socially produced and socially constructed nature of everyday public space.

This thesis has four key research objectives. The first is to address the conceptual confusion that characterises current definitions of, and approaches to, public space, by critically evaluating the diverse ways that the term is mobilised in various academic, policy and popular contexts. This thesis asks: What kinds of models of public space are advanced in current thinking and policy? To what extent can understandings of public space be further developed through carrying out high-resolution empirical research in case study sites? By critically evaluating what the term 'public space' means in a theoretical sense, this research intervenes into prevailing discussions which more often than not take 'public space' to be a tangible, locatable and natural phenomenon. Accounting for the multiple ways that it is perceived and conceived by its various stakeholders, the complexity of 'public space' can be confronted and accounted for.

The second objective is to assess the relationship between public spaces, communities, individual users and the wider environment in which they are situated. This thesis asks: What are the key practical concerns surrounding the notion and condition of public space in contemporary urban policy and literature? Public spaces are routinely related to the creation of the 'good city', 'social justice' and of a sense of 'community'. This research questions any automatic linkage between the development of 'public space' and the achievement of such ambitions. By carrying out new empirical research, this thesis investigates the divergent opportunities and affordances that public space provides for alternative groups within society. This thesis is, therefore, directly responsive to calls for more in-depth research into understanding how individual users use and negotiate the everyday city in manifold ways (Harvey, 2005; Iveson, 2007; Lees, 2003a).



The third objective is to analyse the methods through which contemporary strategies for the creation and management of public spaces can be sensitive to the diverse publics that populate the bustling contemporary city. This thesis asks: Who are the users, actors and interest groups with a stake in how public space is designed, managed, regulated and used? To what extent are shared perspectives on public space necessary for it to function effectively? Given the diverse nature of the urban realm and its inhabitants, this thesis questions the extent to which all public spaces can and do function effectively for all citizens. Despite increasing calls to develop public space for the 'many not the few' (Amin and Thrift, 2002), given the diverse range of needs and interests of the urban citizenry, the desirability or possibility of achieving such outcomes is highly questionable. As discourses of public participation dominate policy guidance, this thesis examines the degree to which 'the public' are welcomed into the policy formulation, implementation and evaluation processes driving current rounds of urban regeneration. A methodological approach, which can be used to account for the opinions, experiences and needs of the multiple stakeholders of public space, is developed. It is then used in the empirical chapters of the thesis to unpack the diverse ways in which the designers, regulators and managers of the two case study sites have (or have not) attempted to be sensitive to the various publics that populate their respective urban locales.

The fourth objective is to analyse current thinking on strategies to improve the quality of urban public spaces within contemporary cities. This thesis asks: To what extent is the design, regulation and management of public spaces informed by a specific vision of 'public space' and 'the public'. To begin to understand what constitutes contemporary urban public space, the ways in which it is conceived within dominant discourses is crucial. The framing visions of public space upon which its development is based can go a long way in explaining the socio-spatial relations enabled and encouraged within the contemporary urban realm. However, to begin to unpack how 'public space' is conceived, conversations must be drawn between policy makers, urban designers, architects, town planners, city centre managers, urban



entrepreneurs and venue managers and regulators. By drawing the multiple stakeholders involved in delivering public spaces into conversation with one another, this thesis can advance debates about the sometimes contradictory, often exclusionary, and increasingly diverse understandings of this everyday phenomenon that underpin initiatives aimed at its improvement.

## **1.2: Statement of Thesis**

This thesis argues that multiple understandings of the public/private divide continue to exert a strong influence upon the social and spatial structure of everyday life in the contemporary urban realm. Understandings of space as public/private influence how spaces in the city are perceived, conceived and lived by its many stakeholders. They affect how space is designed, regulated, managed and used. A critical engagement with the theoretical, philosophical, policy and practical dimensions of public space, therefore, can facilitate a deeper understanding of one of the key social and spatial structures organising contemporary urban life. Nevertheless, before we can begin to understand 'public space' as a key structuring device within society, further attention ought to be paid to what the term actually means. In order to understand what 'public space' is, its foundational terms warrant close scrutiny.

Too many models of public space on offer fail to conceptualise their object of study, providing no explanation of what public space means. With urban transformation rapidly changing the face and fortunes of cities and their inhabitants, any conception of public space must begin by questioning who 'the public' incorporated into visions of 'public space' actually is. The spatial dimension of 'public space' also needs to be more carefully considered and accounted for, as opposed to being assumed to simply naturally exist. Space does not exist as naturally 'public', but is (re)produced as 'public' through the practices and processes of diverse groups. More importantly, however, discussions about public space must bring together, often mutually exclusive, conversations about the 'publicness' and 'spatiality' of public space.

The public/private divide is not a straightforward designation of societal or



spatial spheres, but a rhetorical structuring device, used by powerful upholders of hegemonic discourses, to socially and spatially exclude undesirable groups from parts of the urban realm. The (more or less successful) labelling of space as 'public' and/or 'private', is a prescriptive and descriptive device used in an attempt to control user behaviour (and even entry) in(to) space (Iveson, 2007; Low and Smith, 2006). As opposed to merely prescribing the behaviour of people in space, however, the public/private divide can be the site and stake of contestation. Acknowledging the socially constructed and socially produced nature of public space, it can be seen as simultaneously being a product (material form) and production (process) (Lefebvre, 1991). The processual nature of space means that public space is latent with transformative potential; it is never static, monolithic or objective. Public spaces, therefore, can be considered as spaces *in* which exclusions are generated and enforced, but also as spaces *through* which exclusions can be challenged.

'Public' and 'private' are then better understood, perhaps, as relations that exist in all spaces, with every urban space offering the opportunity to enact both sets of relations (albeit in varying degrees). There is a looseness in space which leaves it there for the taking or making as public or private space, but this does not mean that space is easily transformed. Drawing on the theme of sexuality and space, this thesis argues that whereas 'public spaces' may easily be considered differently theoretically from how they appear, in practice this can be very challenging. Through repetition and regulation, normative practices become naturalised in and through space, as space is used as a tool in the structuration of power. As practices become naturalised and accepted as 'common sense' (Cresswell, 1996), they become more difficult to challenge and change, being ingrained in society, and its practices and values. For example, heterosexuality appears as appropriate sexual comportment in public space and non-normative sexualities become socially and spatially excluded, not only through the policing imposed by some heterosexuals (the threat of violence, harassment or general unease and discomfort), but also through 'queers' themselves, in response to whether or not space is perceived as 'public'.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> According to Warner (2000), the appeal of the word 'queer', most actively used by proponents



Public spaces are spaces in which macro processes, for example urban policy, economic restructuring, the built environment and dominant discourses of space, interpenetrate with micro processes, for example organised activities within space, individual users' interpretation and use of space. It is only by accepting the perpetual permutation of space through the myriad of interactions producing such spaces, such as the combination of macro and micro processes, that the true complexity of public space can be accounted for. Henri Lefebvre's conceptual triad goes some way in providing a theoretical framework that can be used to understand how notions of 'public space' are socially and spatially produced, and inscribed, in the everyday city. However, to create a better understanding of everyday public space, an examination of 'flesh and stone interactions' (Amin and Thrift, 2002: 3) taking place within, and shaping, the contemporary urban realm is required.

Using Lefebvre's conceptual triad to guide empirical investigations is useful in generating an understanding of public space, but it cannot fully account for the spatial complexity of these everyday spaces. It is the 'lived' dimension of space, how space is 'lived' within and against dominant representations of that space, which begins to capture the everyday nature of public space. Public space presses upon different bodies in numerous ways, and equally different bodies press against public space in different ways (Probyn, 1995). A critical spatial framework for understanding contemporary urban public space must account for the multidimensionality and diversity of these interactions. The material and immaterial processes and performances, orchestrated to produce and construct space as 'public', demand further attention when trying to understand what public space is and how it is produced. Public space has symbolic, ideational, material and instrumental qualities that must be accounted for. It changes form and function both over time, across space and depending

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of queer theory (for an overview see Jagose, 1996; Morland and Willox, 2005; Richardson et al., 2006; Seidman, 1996), has far outstripped anyone's sense of what it actually means. In recent years, 'queer' has come to be used as an umbrella term for a coalition of culturally marginal self-identifications, and at other times to describe a 'nascent theoretical model' that has developed out of more traditional lesbian and gay studies (Ting, 1998). 'Queer' is very much a category in the process of continual (re)formation. It is not that 'queer' has yet to solidify and take on a more consistent profile, but that its definitional indeterminacy is one of its constituent characteristics.



on who is viewing it.

Public space is multi-scalar, multi-spatial, multi-genre, multi-media and unfolding through time. It does not have a singular or static identity, but rather constitutes multiple changing forms. 'Public space' is an umbrella term that encapsulates a broad range of spaces, people and interactions between the two. With the proliferation of homogeneous commodified landscapes - and in response to them, alternative 'counterpublic' spaces - the overarching nature of the term appears increasingly imprecise. 'Public space' continues to have a strong imaginary uptake as a 'commonsensical notion'; however, in contemporary society, citizens seem to selectively navigate the city to the extent that public space can be described as an archipelago of enclaves (Hajer and Reijndorp, 2001). Retreat and withdrawal characterise (non)interaction in urban public spaces, as individuals flock to areas where they think that they will find like-minded and/or similar others whilst simultaneously avoiding 'stranger-danger' (Tonkiss, 2005). The move towards enclaves of homogeneity in urban centres raises questions about the possibility for collective urban life, sociability and social justice, qualities that have been traditionally associated with public space.

This thesis argues that by accounting for the power relations and ideologies involved in the social construction and production of space as 'public', we can begin to evaluate the real opportunities for democratic urbanism enabled through these spaces. Perhaps, like our cities, we expect too much from public spaces, but in an era of increasing neoliberal urban regeneration, issues of social and spatial justice and exclusion must be taken seriously. We need to rethink the terms on which people can enact their 'right to the city', if we want to move towards the creation of the 'good cities' promoted in policy, academic and popular circles. Moreover, the terms of the debate about what constitutes good public space and/or the good city are very narrow at present and ought to be extended to incorporate the ideas and opinions of the diverse city public. This will mean confronting the conflictual nature of cities and their inhabitants as opposed to presupposing that all people have similar wishes, needs and



desires for public space.

### **1.3: Thesis Structure**

As a key aim of this thesis is to produce policy relevant research, a familiarity with the state and terms of policy debates about public space is required. Chapter Two sets the political and institutional scene for public space vis-à-vis implicit and explicit government urban policy. In contradistinction to urban policy of the past, contemporaneous expectations for cities, and particularly public space, are high. Critically examining the key facets of New Labour's urban policy agenda i.e. the 'urban renaissance', public space is discussed as both a key facilitator in, and intended outcome of, successful urban transformation. This chapter carefully examines the influence of policy rhetoric, guidelines and formulation and implementation practices, on the social and spatial outcomes for public space. Whilst New Labour creates a 'framing vision' for public space that sees it as directly related to improvements in social cohesion and citizens' quality of life, on closer inspection the public spaces discursively promoted by New Labour are under-girded by an exclusionary commercial ideology. New Labour's mission to improve everyday spaces for all should be applauded; however, its belief that the urban renaissance will benefit all members of the public equally is naïve at best and deceiving at worst.

Chapter Three sets out the qualitative methodological approach developed to carry out research into contemporary urban public space. This chapter critically explores the procedural, philosophical and practical issues faced whilst designing, conducting and presenting the research constituting this thesis. The benefits of the multi-method qualitative ethnographic and case study approach adopted are outlined in relation to their potential to carry out theoretical refinement and extension of the concept of 'public space'. Some of the key challenges faced in attempting to produce rigorous, valid and policy-relevant research are discussed and justifications for the approach taken explained.

Having set out how public space is conceptualised within New Labour's urban policy, and the methodological approach developed to research everyday public



space, Chapter Four situates this thesis in relation to existing literature. This chapter begins by explicitly theorising the 'public' dimension of 'public space'. Charting the multiple ways in which the term 'public' is structured, ordinarily in an interdependent relationship with 'private', the impossibility of precisely defining what is meant by this commonsensical notion is highlighted. The problematic nature of the public/private divide being naturalised, despite its prescriptive and descriptive nature, is documented. Working through the key themes within the relevant literature, this chapter argues that understandings of 'public space' need to take the 'publicness' and 'spatiality' of this term more seriously. At present, public space is represented, ironically, more often than not, as an aspatial entity.

Chapter Five, responds directly to the need to spatialise notions of 'public space' by developing a critical spatial model which can be used to research contemporary urban public space. Drawing on the work of a range of critical theorists, predominantly Lefebvre (1991) and those drawing on his ideas (Dimendberg, 1998; Light and Smith, 1998; Shields, 1999; Soja, 1996), space is exposed as being constituted of ideational, symbolic, instrumental and material elements. Through the integration of these historically specific and contextually dependent dimensions, space is illustrated as a processual entity and an ongoing production, as opposed to a stable, monolithic product. As Soja has commented, Lefebvre 'has been more influential than any other scholar in opening up and exploring the limitless dimensions of our social spatiality' (1996: 6). By outlining Lefebvre's 'unitary theory' of space through his conceptual triad of spaces of representation, representations of space and spatial practice, and combining it with insights from De Certeau's (1984) tactics and strategies and Butler's (1996) performativity, this chapter argues that the complex (re)production and (re)construction of space can be examined in an everyday setting.

Chapters Six and Seven use the critical spatial framework developed in Chapter Five to investigate the two empirical case study sites incorporated into this thesis. Chapter Six discusses Newcastle-Upon-Tyne's gay village, the Pink



Triangle, and Chapter Seven examines Gateshead's contemporary art factory, BALTIC. The empirical chapters of the thesis highlight a set of critical challenges facing contemporary urban public spaces, being chosen for their explanatory and analytical power, and not to be 'typical'. The insights gained from a high-resolution investigation of each site, generate new empirical material that is used to refine and extend the critical spatial framework for understanding contemporary urban public space. The ways in which each of the spaces is used, designed, managed and regulated around understandings of the spaces as 'public' is critically analysed.

It is within the final chapter that the generalisability of the study is critically evaluated. Chapter Eight brings together the key policy, theoretical and empirical findings of this thesis and discusses their portability across diverse urban terrains. It outlines the critical spatial model developed through the integration of the primary and secondary research components of the thesis. A number of policy recommendations are made, and the limitations of the study acknowledged.

#### **1.4: Thesis Themes**

Several intersecting research themes run throughout the individual chapters of this thesis. They constitute key research areas for contemporary urban public space. The first theme is explicitly theorising both the public and spatial aspects of 'public space'. Within this thesis, 'public space' is explicitly theorised by synthesising and integrating key arguments within existing literature with primary findings and analysis from the empirical endeavours of this research project. The second and related theme is the social production and social construction of space. This thesis critically explores how notions of 'public space' are produced and constructed through discursive and non-discursive practices. The significance of material and immaterial processes and performances in the production of public space is highlighted and discussed. By combining these two themes, the conceptual confusion characterising public space can be clearly addressed, providing some clarity about *what* it actually constitutes and *how* it is constituted.



The third theme is the centrality of, and vision for, public space under New Labour's urban renaissance. In particular, the thesis is interested in how policy guidelines, rhetoric, and implementation and formulation practices, directly and indirectly influence the form and function of public space in the contemporary urban realm. A specific concern is New Labour's overly design-led approach to public space development and its belief that 'publicness', 'public life' and 'public sociability' can be simply designed and built into a space. The fourth theme is somewhat related to this and looks at the relationship between art, architecture and public space. This theme is a specific focus of Chapter Seven in relation to the renovation of BALTIC flourmills. However, the importance of the material environment in relation to whether space is perceived, conceived and lived as 'public' runs throughout the thesis. It is discussed in relation to the commodification of public space as charted in urban literature, the designing out of behaviours and practices under the urban renaissance, and the influence of the design of the Pink Triangle in facilitating public and private encounters.

The fifth theme is the relationship between sexuality and space. Hegemonic understandings of 'public space' as the space of the heterosexual go a long way in unravelling one of the ideological discourses underpinning behaviour and actions in public space. By paying closer attention to the different ways that 'public space' presses upon different groups, the repressive nature of public space as a descriptive and prescriptive term is illustrated. The final theme is have we come to the end of public space? This thesis critically explores how public space has changed over time and space, to produce multiple spatialities, each of which providing a diverse range of opportunities and affordances for specific members of a discriminatory 'public'. The thesis not only considers the changing form and function of public spaces as documented in the literature, but also questions the extent to which the public/private divide retains practical, theoretical and philosophical authority in explaining the social and spatial life of the contemporary urban realm and its inhabitants.

Over time, libraries, cafes, train stations, parks, town squares, traditional



piazas, airports, shopping malls, the computer screen interface and museums have all been considered and promoted as public space. How can such a diverse range of spaces be encapsulated within this umbrella term? What do they all have in common? What makes them 'public space'? Who decides which spaces are considered 'public'? Is the flexibility of the term 'public space' a strength or a weakness? All of these questions require a sustained and critical engagement with a range of literatures, including (but not limited to): urban studies, geography, critical and cultural theory, urban planning and design, architecture, social theory and policy, philosophy and sociology. However, to get to the heart of what public space is, a stand-alone literature review is insufficient. To begin to get to grips with public space, we need to look at the spaces around us; we need to understand how space is 'lived' as public. Put simply, we need to understand how public space figures within the lives of everyday citizens.

## Chapter 2

### **New Labour's urban policy agenda: Reinvigorating public space through the 'Urban Renaissance'**

#### **2: Introduction**

A key aim of this thesis is to understand how 'public space' is conceptualised in the multiple discourses within which it circulates. In recent years, 'public space' has received increased attention and has undergone pronounced transformation in British urban policy. This chapter examines the changing nature of public space over the last few decades vis-à-vis explicit and implicit government urban policies. Whilst debates over what urban policy is persist, Cochrane's broad understanding of it is used throughout this thesis: 'Urban policy is both an expression of contemporary understandings of the urban, of what makes cities what they are, and itself helps to shape those understandings as well as the cities themselves' (2007: 13). Cochrane's definition is particularly useful in relation to the key claims of this chapter, highlighting the mutually dependent relationship between how the urban realm is 'thought' in policy and the form that the 'material' city takes.

This chapter argues that policy visions and frameworks for urban public space directly and indirectly influence the kinds of public space developed in towns and cities. Public space has received a renewed vitality under New Labour and is now anticipated as both a key facilitator and product of successful urban transformation. Focussing primarily on New Labour's urban renaissance agenda, the influence of policy rhetoric, guidelines and formulation, and implementation practices on the social and spatial outcomes for public space is critically analysed. Whereas New Labour promotes the development of openly accessible public spaces, linking them to the creation of social cohesion, community values and an improvement in citizens' quality of life, the types of public space inspired through its agenda often fall short of such ideals. This chapter discusses some of the reasons behind these shortfalls and begins to make some suggestions for improvements to the policy process.



This chapter comprises six interrelated sections. It starts by setting out the political and institutional landscape inherited by New Labour, moving on to explaining how the 'urban renaissance' was intentionally set up in contradistinction to previous urban policy approaches. It then critically analyses the centrality of public spaces in the creation of 'good cities', advancing to discuss the overly design-led approach to their development. This leads to a discussion of the presumed significance of community involvement in the creation of 'liveable cities', specifically in relation to the promotion of New Labour's active citizenship. After questioning the sincerity and capability of existing governmental mechanisms and practices in facilitating 'public participation' in the planning process, the extent to which its localisation is synonymous with democratisation is evaluated. Finally, there is a critical exploration of the multiple stakeholders and key individuals involved in delivering public spaces, specifically the recently established City Centre Managers, who demonstrate New Labour's continued reliance on the private sector to deliver the urban renaissance.

## **2.1: British Urban policy: From the Urban Programme to the enterprise culture**

From the 1960s to the present day, the state of the urban realm has been a perennial concern for British government. The traditional Urban Programme (UP), launched by the Labour Prime Minister Harold Wilson in 1968, was a response to the growing recognition that previous policy had failed to reduce the high levels of poverty and disadvantage that characterised British cities. The dominant political narrative driving the UP was that urban deprivation and disadvantage was restricted to particular areas. Its solution was therefore to target the 'deviant populations' residing there in an attempt to turn around their 'pathological behaviour' through the provision of essential services (Edwards, 1984). As Atkinson (2000) highlights, this was inevitably problematic as the causes of urban problems were conceived as originating in the locales themselves, hence no effort was made to consider the wider societal forces operating within these areas. With a lack of consideration for the wider forces affecting the spaces and people constituting the so-called 'urban problem', it is



unsurprising that little, if any, progress was made during the UP, which ran up until 1978 (Johnstone and Whitehead, 2004).

In 1977, Peter Shore oversaw a major review of inner city policy in the form of the then Labour government's White Paper, *Policy for the Inner Cities*. The commissioned report was an attempt to understand the causes behind the increasing urban deprivation plaguing large swathes of inner city Britain, in the hope of making positive changes. In it, Shore made a clear diagnosis: that the root cause of inner city problems was the collapse of their economic infrastructures brought about by the emigration of firms to out of town sites or their death *in situ* - compounded by the socially selective emigration of their populations (Robson, 1988). Shore's report brought policy findings in line with existing academic and popular criticisms (see Foreman-Peck and Gripaios, 1977), subsequently demanding and inspiring new approaches towards alleviating deprivation.

Urban deprivation was no longer to be the 'burden of the welfare state' (Jessop, 1988). Shore's diagnosis lent itself far more readily than its predecessors to an enterprise solution, rousing a widely shared belief that: 'What needed to be done now was clear: new industry, new jobs, and an economically active workforce to be attracted back to the inner areas in order to regenerate their economic infrastructures' (Deakin and Edwards, 1993: 3). Economically active people and spaces were the order of the day, rendering the deleterious condition of many economically inactive public spaces a relatively insignificant issue. In 1979, however, the implications of Shore's findings were to take on a slightly unexpected and unforeseen form as the Conservative Party moved into power.<sup>2</sup>

The incoming Conservative government was dedicated both ideologically and

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<sup>2</sup> The election of Thatcher into power in 1979 witnessed a significant shift in the political direction of the Conservative Party. As argued by Jessop (1980), Thatcherism moved away from the long held 'one nation' Tory approach of the post-war era towards a 'two nations' state strategy. In the 'two nations' strategy, the successful market and aspirational working and middle class, primarily conceived as being resident in southern England, were counterpoised against the inefficient and cumbersome state and working class, who were primarily conceived as being located in northern England.



practically to encouraging the private sector to take on the task of regenerating the inner cities.<sup>3</sup> From 1979-1997, Conservative urban policy was characterised by its unyielding commitment to the promotion of 'enterprise', headed by the then Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, Michael Heseltine (Corner and Harvey, 1991). The 'enterprise' approach consisted of using public resources as incentives to attract commerce, business and industry back to designated sectors in or near inner city areas. The associated regeneration would be development-led; enterprise activity would burgeon old wastelands; new jobs would be created; the 'inner city economies' would be revitalised; and a dependent population energised by the culture of enterprise.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, policy for inner city regeneration underwent a transformation from a reliance on central and local government activity and the use of public funds, to a much heavier dependence on private sector investment. The Conservative government, in its aim to create the conditions under which the 'enterprise culture' could thrive, selectively withdrew the power of local councils in the process of strategic urban development. The Conservatives considered local governments as an impediment to development, inefficient and back-ward thinking, especially the Labour-led Metropolitan Councils (eradicated by Thatcher in 1986) that opposed the enterprise culture because of its limited responsibility for, and accountability to, the existing local community (see Duncan and Goodwin, 1988; Eisenschitz and Gough, 1993). After their establishment in 1981, private-led Urban Development Corporations (UDCs) inherited many of the local council's powers, taking the responsibility of managing mid to large-scale urban redevelopment in inner-city problem areas.

As argued by Imrie and Thomas: 'Since 1981, the UDCs have symbolised the ideological and political values of successive Conservative governments, the rhetoric of the market over planning, and the propagation of a property, in

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<sup>3</sup> Pickvance argues that due to Thatcher's (1985) famous line 'We must do something about these inner cities' and the subsequent urban policy that followed: 'Inner city refers not only to a particular location, but also to its symbolic connotations: poverty, housing stress, unemployment and racial tension. These perceptions are present in the public mind and explain why no British government can afford not to have an inner city policy of some kind' (1990: 20).



distinction to a people based approach to urban regeneration' (1993: vii). Unlike the democratically elected local councils, UDCs were introduced to bring about rapid and efficient property-led development, and to institute new commercially inspired approaches to urban transformation. UDCs distributed allocated public funding to private investors in the form of subsidies, tax breaks and the provision of essential infrastructures in return for investment into problem urban areas. By improving the fabric of the local environment and strengthening local economies, the Conservative government argued that such benefits would automatically 'trickle down' to the wider populace. Nevertheless, this was unrealistic as the purposes pursued by private sector investors are often necessarily different from the ends intended by social improvement policies.<sup>4</sup> As will be further discussed in Chapter Four, the privatisation of public space often leads, in this case, to exacerbated social and spatial exclusion and/or displacement of marginal 'problem' groups.

The UDC's demonstrated little interest in the provision of public spaces, seeing them as an unnecessary financial drain (Bianchini, 1990). They promoted commercial profit-driven developments with high 'exchange-value', as opposed to openly accessible public spaces with pronounced 'use-value'. This inevitably inspired an increase in the development of new privatised spaces, at the expense of existing and/or potential new public spaces. Bianchini and Montgomery (1991) note that this 'new urbanism' was primarily an exercise in the American model of creating exclusive 'urban villages' or other commercially driven, self-contained, customised urban environments for the middle classes. Such practices were concerned neither with the creation of democratic public spaces, nor with how they would fit into the overall urban fabric of their locale. This change in governance and its associated view towards public space is crucial in understanding the contemporary urban governance landscape.

UDCs exemplified the movement towards the centrality of the private sector in the redevelopment of the public urban realm, a trend that this thesis will argue

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<sup>4</sup> Bianchini (1990) highlights how Conservative urban regeneration prioritised physical renewal and largely failed to lay the foundations for long-term solutions to the economic and social problems of the inner cities.



has continued up until the present day – albeit to varying degrees. To draw on a pertinent example, in the 1990s the Tyne and Wear UDC inspired the dramatic physical, symbolic, cultural and social transformation of the dilapidated north bank of the River Tyne – turning it into a desirable residential, leisure and working environment for those that could afford to occupy this premium space. That the south bank of the Tyne has undergone equally dramatic transformation in recent years, as will be comprehensively discussed in Chapter Seven, highlights the continuing impact of the UDCs selective geographies of regeneration for contemporary urban policy.<sup>5</sup> Urban policy is never politically neutral; rather it promotes specific place-making ideals, mechanisms, processes and outcomes. Nowhere is this more significant than in relation to the character of public space.

Urban policy is a perpetual concern for government, specifically due to the constantly changing nature of the urban realm and the massive population that has residence in, or some connection to, these locales. As stated by Newcastle's City Centre Manager:

Urban policy marks out the winners from the losers. The spaces are complex and suffer from many residual problems and it takes something special to turn the situation around. At the end of the Conservative rule in the 1990s, the cities were still real trouble areas, but New Labour promised to turn that around.

(Usher, pers. comm., 2005)<sup>6</sup>

Johnstone and Whitehead (2004) argue that although the UP marked the beginning of three decades of continuous government intervention into urban affairs, choices made in all areas of public policy, both before and after 1968, meant that the deprivation faced by some communities in 1998 was arguably more acute than ever. This chapter now describes and evaluates New Labour's attempts to 'turn around' the 'residual problems' of British cities, specifically in relation to the centrality of public space.

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<sup>5</sup> Tyne and Wear UDC did not operate on the south bank of the Tyne, and this is arguably why Gateshead Council has been able to adopt a less commercial and more culture-focussed regeneration strategy. However, the fact that the north bank of the Tyne was already developed by Tyne and Wear UDC meant that the south bank was a particularly attractive area in which to invest.

<sup>6</sup> Where quotations are designated as 'pers. comm.', they are taken directly from interviews conducted as part of this research.



## 2.2: New Labour's Urban Renaissance

New Labour's election into power in 1997 marked the end of 18 years of Conservative dominance in Britain. Following four successive election victories, the defeat of the John Major-led Conservative Party in May 1997 was a decisive vote for change (Driver and Martell, 2002; Ward and Jones, 2004). As argued by Ward and Jones:

As such, it was essential for New Labour to establish early on in their first term of office a discursive, symbolic and material distinctiveness in their approach to policymaking. And nowhere have the claims been bigger and bolder than in the realm of urban policy.

(2004: 143)

Indeed, urban policy is one of the key areas to have received renewed vitality under New Labour. From the outset, Blair was explicit in his promise to start an 'unprecedented campaign to combat the ills of urban living and create good cities through the generation of firm guidance in the form of national policy' (speech at the Aylesbury estate, London, 1997). More specifically in relation to this thesis, public space has undergone dramatic 'discursive, symbolic and material' transformation within contemporary politics.

Labour's return to power in 1997 was accompanied by a reassertion of cities as being the centre of national economic, political, social and cultural life. New Labour has attempted to move away from the popular and academic rhetoric of degeneration and decline used by critics to encapsulate the British urban condition for the previous 18 years of Conservative rule (Deakin and Edwards, 1993; Imrie and Thomas, 1993). It has purposely sought to reinvigorate towns and cities with the value that it believes these areas have the potential to develop. Nevertheless, inheriting a set of circumstances which had led to cities being negatively characterised as financial drains, havens of social ill, seedbeds for moral delinquency and cultural vacuums (Amin et al., 2000), New Labour was aware of the numerous complex and multi-dimensional challenges ahead. Making cities 'places where people *want* to live, work and play' (ODPM, 2003: 1, emphasis in original), would be a demanding task.

Amin et al. highlight that one of the most pressing issues raised by Labour's



commitment to generating new urban policy was that: 'To approach something as complex as policy for cities it is necessary to have a framing *vision* of what and who cities are for, and what kinds of societies they most democratically embody' (2000: vi, emphasis in original). The notion of a 'framing vision' alludes to something beyond the way in which cities are 'framed' or conceptualised in a temporally static or spatially bounded way at that particular moment in time. It favours an approach that provides the potential for change and direct guidance for a movement towards a preferred *vision*, a state pre-defined as desirable.<sup>7</sup> If government policy was to supply the impetus, resources and direction for the progression towards an aspirational state, it was essential to get the foundational 'framing vision' right. It was precisely at this point, at the inception of exactly what was meant by the 'good city', that questions regarding who and what was to be included in and/or excluded from the city needed to be addressed. In sum, Labour's return to power gave hope for both a greater recognition of the importance of the city, and scope for real debate about the sort of 'framing vision' that might guide new policies (Holden and Iveson, 2003).

New Labour was aware that establishing a suitable 'framing vision' for urban policy required a thorough understanding of the conditions within contemporary British cities. The failure to do so by the Conservatives had contributed to inner city rioting in Leeds, Manchester, Liverpool, London and Birmingham from 1979-1985, most intensely in 1981 and 1985. While the riots were commonly conceived as race riots, a subsequent government report, conducted by Lord Scarman (1981), highlighted that they were more broadly symptomatic of the social and economic distress infested in the inner cities, due to the high levels of multiple disadvantage found there. The failure of the Conservative government to reverse the plight of the inner cities, contrary to its claims, contributed to further riots, which resulted in a damning report by the Archbishop of Canterbury's Commission on Urban Priority Areas. The report, entitled *Faith in the City* (1985), was the result of extensive research carried out across many British inner cities, which controversially concluded that much of

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<sup>7</sup> These have direct political and policy implications as highlighted in the debates around where the city begins and ends in relation to the notion of 'City-Regions' (see Amin and Thrift, 2002).



the blame for growing spiritual, social and economic poverty found there was due to Thatcherite policies.

New Labour's urban strategy would be dissimilar to previous policies because of changes in the urban conditions it faced and its alternative approach to dealing with societal issues. The movement away from the ideological underpinnings of the previous Conservative governments, whereby private investment was the sole solution to urban ills, was matched by the movement away from those of the Old Left who gave priority to state intervention in social and economic problems. These ambitions are explicit in New Labour's first Manifesto:

The Old Left would have sought state control of industry. The Conservative right is content to leave all to the market. We reject both approaches. Government and industry must work together to achieve key objectives aimed at enhancing the dynamism of the market, not undermining it. (1997)

However, before New Labour could even begin to bring the state and the market together to redevelop the urban realm, it wanted to form the 'ideas' and 'ideals' upon which urban transformation would be founded.

In 1997, New Labour appointed The Urban Task Force (UTF), a body of independent professional consultants headed by its loyal and highly acclaimed architect Lord Richard Rogers, to investigate the state of English cities.<sup>8</sup> As its mission statement explained: 'The Urban Task Force will identify causes of urban decline in England and recommend practical solutions to bring people back into our cities, towns and urban neighbourhoods' (UTF, 1999: 1). The UTF portrayed the urban realm, which had engendered the fears and despair of the nation for many years (Deakin and Edwards, 1993; Imrie and Thomas, 1993), in a new light. It was not only an area with economic potential, but also a space that could take 'social' and 'environmental' concerns seriously (UTF, 1999). This new conception of the urban realm was to prove instrumental in improving the character of public space within urban policy.

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<sup>8</sup> Richard Rogers had been a close advisor to Labour Members of Parliament. His highly topical book, *A New London* (1992), had been funded by the Labour Party and promoted a number of the key principles upon which New Labour's urban agenda was founded, such as the key role of urban design, public spaces and community.



The UTF's extensive investigation into the condition of English cities led to the publication of a final report, *Towards an Urban Renaissance* (UTF, 1999). This report was an attempt to bring UK cities into line with the high standards of selected European urban environments, drawing on examples such as Barcelona, Bilbao and Copenhagen as models of best practice.<sup>9</sup> The main features of the report were its emphasis on design-led regeneration; the (re)design of public space to stimulate more viable uses and inspire the integration of place based communities; the demand for local authorities to create comprehensive strategies detailing regeneration programmes for the spatial planning, economy and culture of the local area; the importance of increased partnerships with the private sector; the increased commitment to public participation in the process of urban development; and the widespread regeneration of the overall urban environment.<sup>10</sup>

The UTF report recommended an explicit reinvigoration of public space within contemporary cities:

Towns and cities should be well-designed, be more compact and connected, support a range of diverse uses within a sustainable environment...The process of change should combine strengthened democratic leadership with an increased commitment to public participation and flourishing public spaces. (UTF, 1999: 1)

It made strong and clear suggestions to New Labour about how to create the 'good cities' that it promised. With the centrality of national government in formulating and delivering a new urban agenda being a key recommendation of the UTF report, many eagerly awaited the official governmental response.

In 2000, New Labour produced its formal response to the Rogers' report in the form of the Urban White Paper (UWP), *Our Towns and Cities: Delivering an*

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<sup>9</sup> Strategies for regenerating Bilbao and Barcelona were connected to the desirability of promoting an urban middle-class presence in what had long been city centres in industrial decline.

<sup>10</sup> The UTF report promoted a European approach to urban development, as opposed to the Americanised approach of the previous governments. Traditionally, the European approach was conceptualised as an attempt to make the urban realm safer, more accessible and more attractive to all citizens. Policies did this by promoting cultural animation, pedestrianisation, traffic calming and improvement to urban design and the useability of the environment, for example, through improved public transport and more human scale development (Bianchini, 1990, 1993).



*Urban Renaissance* (DETR, 2000). At the heart of the UWP was a new vision of urban living: 'Our vision is of towns and cities which offer a high quality of life and opportunity for all, not just the few. The urban renaissance will benefit everyone, making towns and cities vibrant and successful places where people want to live, work and play' (DETR, 2000: 7). Overall, the prescriptions of the UWP were remarkably similar to those of the UTF report, with all of the main features of the Rogers report (as set out above) figuring heavily. The UWP marked a major split from the extended tradition of 'anti-urbanism' in English urban policy, whereby from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century onwards, the size and material form of cities were deemed responsible for the unpleasant conditions and problems to be found there (Colomb, 2007; Gordon et al., 2004). Within the UWP, New Labour presented cities as the *solutions* to economic and social problems as opposed to the *causes* of them.<sup>11</sup>

The UWP rehearsed the country's principal urban challenges and set out a new vision for urban living, accepting the need for long-term policies that jointly addressed economic, social and environmental issues as suggested in the UTF report. There were, however, some notable differences between the two reports. For example, Lees notes the import of the government's Social Exclusion Unit agenda (SEU, 2000) within the UWP, arguing that it appears to have mediated some of the 'middle class excesses' of the UTF report by making policy prescriptions more inclusive of all sectors of society (2003d: 74). Rogers made a public announcement about his disappointment at the government's lack of interest in tackling urban problems at a wider national level, denouncing the decentralisation of urban development to the local level, publishing an independent UTF pamphlet calling for a 'stronger urban renaissance with faster progress' (UTF, 2005). Nonetheless, the similarities between the two reports far outweigh any dissimilarity; with both demonstrating a strong conviction in the need for, and benefits of, a specific form of urban transformation: an urban renaissance. This signalled a dramatic change in the fortune of urban public space within government guidance, promoting it from

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<sup>11</sup> According to Colomb (2007), the UWP reflects the 'new conventional wisdom' promoted by the OECD and the EU, which views successful urban development as key in securing a combination of competitiveness, cohesion and effective governance required for survival in the new economy, with environmental sustainability as a bonus.



being a background concern to a lynchpin of urban public policy.

### 2.2.1: 'Urban Renaissance' as metaphor

New Labour uses the metaphor of 'urban renaissance' to encapsulate the overall programme it designed to combat urban ills and help create 'good cities'.<sup>12</sup> Governmental discourse constructs the urban renaissance as an inherently progressive strategy that will lead to comprehensive improvements within the urban realm, for the benefit of all citizens (DETR, 2000). However, such claims have received much critical attention, not least from within academia. As it is impossible to understand the form and function of public spaces within contemporary cities without considering the urban renaissance agenda at large, it is crucial to comment on some of the shortcomings stemming from its discursive production.<sup>13</sup>

This chapter is directly concerned with identifying the types of public space promoted both implicitly and explicitly through the policy rhetoric and practices of the 'urban renaissance'. The discursive turn in urban studies and urban geography focuses directly on the idiom and rhetoric framing policy goals and mechanisms. It originates in the conviction that the cultural politics of representation are inseparable from the official politics of governance and decision-making.<sup>14</sup> Text and language are understood as forms of discourse that help generate and replicate social meaning (Lees, 2003d; Lemke, 1995).

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<sup>12</sup> New Labour's broad political approach was often characterised as the 'Third Way'. Following Johnstone and Whitehead: 'While perhaps characterised more by political pragmatism than ideological coherence, the Third Way is premised upon an acceptance, within prevailing global economic pressures, of tight controls on government spending and the promotion of a competitive market ethos throughout society' (2004: 8). However, the Third Way does not only focus on the market. As Johnstone and Whitehead go on to argue: 'Allied to such neo-liberal orthodoxies, Third Way politics also suggest the need for a more *caring* brand of public policy, which while encouraging personal freedoms and individualism, addresses issues of social injustice and promotes the formation of more inclusive and engaged social community' (2004: 9; Giddens, 1985). The urban renaissance represents an important component of the Third Way.

<sup>13</sup> Fairclough's (1992) 'critical discourse analysis' emphasises how the linguistic strategies deployed by key actors, and the content of specific formulations, terms and arguments, legitimises action and structures the parameters of policy intervention (Jacobs, 2006: 42). A discursive approach to urban policy can thus help unpack the ideological and moral underpinnings of urban policy agendas.

<sup>14</sup> Maginn argues that in our 'post-modern media-savvy world' it is clear to see that our politicians and policymakers are obsessed with 'image-visual policy' (2006: 11). Presenting an effective and convincing policy image requires a skilful construction of language or discourse in both written and spoken form.



This is pertinent in relation to the formulation of national urban policy geared towards the 'urban renaissance', where a focus on the language and strategies of argument i.e. rhetoric, is revealing.

Atkinson notes that there is a dialectical relationship connecting the discursive and the non-discursive, such that: 'one cannot exist (or even be imagined) without the other' (2000: 212). In relation to the formulation of national policy guidance, Hastings proposes that:

The analytical advantage of a discursive approach is that it focuses attention on specifically historical and geographical pillars of institutionalised knowledge, power and practice, which advocates particular regeneration initiatives as the solution to urban ills.  
(1998: 283)

The discursive frameworks adopted to justify particular forms of urban regeneration have far-reaching implications for the kinds of cities promoted and developed. What the discursive turn demands of the urban renaissance metaphor is a thorough investigation into what it means and does: What are the processes and mechanisms engendered within it? How do they play out on the ground? More specifically for this thesis, what are the overall effects on public space?

Urban policy's new key word - 'renaissance' - defies a simple definition. Lees highlights that in contrast to the previous Conservative government's urban regeneration, New Labour's urban renaissance has tended to ally itself to social justice and liberation:

Their concept of urban renaissance goes beyond the physical environmental objectives to include concerns for social inclusion, wealth creation, sustainable development, urban governance, health and welfare, crime prevention, educational opportunity and freedom of movement, as well as environmental quality and good design.  
(2003d: 66)

On the surface, the urban renaissance promises a holistic approach to urban transformation whereby physical environments display a social conscience. It conceives of public space as a platform for reinvigorating the concrete everyday landscape, whilst simultaneously displaying evidence of social responsibility for the wider urban public. However, closer investigation into the kind of developments encouraged signifies that the glossy rhetoric of the socially and



environmentally aware urban renaissance can cloak the exclusionary capabilities, or even intentions, of the policies and mechanisms underlying the project.

Lees fervently argues that policy makers endorse the 'discursively invisible process of gentrification as the saviour in troubled English inner cities' (2003b: 616). Despite never mentioning the word 'gentrification', the UTF report and the UWP advocate key practices associated with the gentrification process, for example, bringing the 'middle classes' back into the inner city to reduce concentrated poverty by re-habilitating housing in deprived neighbourhoods (DETR, 2000: 110).<sup>15</sup> This image of cosmopolitan cultural regeneration feeds into the language of sustainability, diversity, community and thus citizenship rights (Holden and Iveson, 2003; Rogers and Coaffee, 2005). However, such processes beg the questions: Are the implications of bringing the middle classes back to the inner cities a way of reducing poverty in these areas? Alternatively, are they simply displacing it as property prices rise, pushing the lower classes out of the housing market - as has been evident in the redevelopment of many US cities adopting this method of urban regeneration?<sup>16</sup> In relation to this thesis, which members of the urban public are included in the visions of public space in urban policies?

Debates over whether or not the urban renaissance can be accurately characterised as a process of gentrification proliferate (Atkinson, 2003; Colomb, 2007; Lees, 2003a). However, it is widely accepted that the implications of strategies promoting middle class 'recolonisation' of inner cities can be analysed in terms of *potential* gentrification, initiating new forms of control over public space and the regulation of behaviour. It follows that the urban

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<sup>15</sup> The UWP remains pro-gentrification as it actively promotes market-led gentrification as an instrument of both urban regeneration and social and economic policy. Colomb highlights that it would be useful to know how the researchers involved in the production of the UTF and UWP documents 'weighed up the overwhelming evidence that gentrification tends to harm rather than help neighbourhoods with the governments ideas of gentrification as the saviour of British inner cities' (2007: 12).

<sup>16</sup> New Labour's vision has been compared to that rooted in the American 'New Urbanism' movement and in recent US debates about 'smart urban growth' (Guy et al., 2005: 235); but more so aspires to the idealised vision of the design-led regeneration in cities such as Copenhagen and Barcelona, which are often referred to as aspirational in policy documents (DETR, 1999).



renaissance may be having similar effects as gentrification and/or aestheticisation initiatives, irrespective of whether or not such effects were the government's intentions. New Labour's urban policies create a significant tension between their predictable marginalising effects and the socially just, heterogeneous and inclusive city that is its professed project. An inherent tension exists within approaches to city centre renaissance, what Lees highlights as the 'mismatch between rhetoric and lived reality' (2003b: 626). On the one hand, aiming to bring people back to the city and embracing diversity and social mixing, but on the other, putting in place implicit and explicit measures that discriminate about who can be permitted access and what activities can be undertaken – particularly in public space (Rogers and Coaffee, 2005).<sup>17</sup>

The urban renaissance agenda, originally set out in the UTF report and taken up in the UWP, has influenced recent government policy (*Social Exclusion Unit*, 1999; *Neighbourhood Renewal Agenda*, 2001; *Sustainable Communities Programme*, 2003; *State of Our Cities*, 2006). It is also set to influence urban policy for the near future by providing a 'framing vision' for future initiatives, therefore, its prescriptions and those it has inspired warrant scrutiny. Whereas increased attention to the troubles and the potential of the urban realm has been welcomed with open arms by academics, policymakers and citizens alike, the problems inherent in the resultant national urban policy 'solutions' are well documented. It is not within the scope of this thesis to expound all of the shortcomings of national urban policy; however, some of them require attention as they hold particular significance in relation to the role of public space.<sup>18</sup>

### **2.3: The centrality of public space in the Urban Renaissance**

Since the publication of the UTF and UWP reports, there has been a frenzy in the production of government guidance making an increasingly powerful case

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<sup>17</sup> The urban renaissance agenda can be interpreted as both an attempt to deal with, and address, the adverse impacts of the neoliberal political and economic restructuring of the inner city, whilst being part of the neoliberal urban project (MacLeod and Ward, 2002; Ward, 2003).

<sup>18</sup> For a detailed overview see: Amin et al. (2000); Holden and Iveson (2003); Imrie and Raco (2003); Johnstone and Whitehead (2004); Lees (2003a, 2003b).



for improvements in the quality of public spaces in the city. The relationship between public space and quality of life, economic competitiveness and social cohesion has been articulated in a variety of important policy related contexts (DETR, 2000; DCGL, 2006; ODPM 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005; UTF, 1999). Subsequently, New Labour advocates that: 'The quality of our public spaces affects the quality of all of our lives' (ODPM, 2002: 1), and under the rubric of liveability, claims that: 'High quality public spaces are a big part of the urban renaissance agenda' (ODPM, 2001: 17). Public spaces are at the centre of the government's commitment to improving the liveability of cities, not least because they are the areas which all citizens encounter and have legal rights of access to on a daily basis.

Charged by policymakers with increasing community cohesion, civic identity and quality of life, expectations of public space are high (Mean and Tims, 2005). There would appear to be widespread agreement about the importance of making improvements to public space. However, there is considerable ambiguity over what the term 'public space' means in national policy guidance. As highlighted by Williams et al.: 'A clear definition of public space is lacking and definitions in official documents are becoming inappropriate as the nature of ownership and management of public space changes. A common typology is absent from national guidance and legislation' (2001: 2). Many of the town planners interviewed as part of this thesis routinely commented that one of the most pressing issues in developing urban 'public spaces', as encouraged by government, is the lack of clarity about exactly what this term means and, therefore, what form such spaces ought to take.

Imrie claims that the confusion generated by the often-contradictory models of public space uncritically adopted in policy is because: 'Many policy makers do not even try to conceptualise their objects of analysis or policy application' (2003: 9). There is a general uncertainty as to what these key aspirations of government policy - these 'good public spaces' – actually constitute, making the delivery of such ambitions inherently difficult. However, amongst the local council members interviewed for this research, there was a common belief that



despite the lack of instructive or explicit guidance about what public spaces are, there are some implicit assumptions about what these spaces should aim to be and do. This is a common theme of the thesis, as academics and policy makers alike often discuss public space without considering what the term actually means – people are assumed to already know.

The ideas of the council workers hold resonance with the views of Amin et al., who argue that the interpretation of urban democracy implicit within national policy guidance follows a long line of theorisations of public spaces as: ‘a source of citizenship, sparked by relaxation and mingling with friends and strangers alike’ (2000: 32). Interview transcripts are littered with the suggestion that ‘everyone should be able to access public spaces’; ‘all citizens can come together in public spaces’; ‘we can all share public space’. Indeed, the UWP states that: ‘Public space must be somewhere for everyone to relax and enjoy the urban experience together’ (DETR, 2000: 57). Whereas it is generally accepted that there is no question about the desirability of making public spaces accessible to all law abiding citizens, the automatic linkage of public spaces with citizenship is problematic as such spaces are increasingly sites for private pleasure and retreat, rather than socialisation with strangers (Mitchell, 2003).

A reformed and revitalised public domain is presented as a visible task that New Labour can undertake to sweep away the dark days of Thatcherite individualism, and usher in a new age where community emerges as the primary mode of citizenship (Holden and Iveson, 2003). However, New Labour’s policies rely on a notion of the ‘common good’, something that is becoming ever hard to specify in a world where individuals arguably mainly seek their own ‘private good’ (Levasseur and Carlin, 2001). Whilst the power of a notion of the ‘common good’ holds political legitimacy in a democratic society, it is essential to acknowledge that policies impact upon individuals in unique ways. The public sphere must allow citizens to voice their concerns and experiences, so that it can highlight and account for the importance of individual circumstances, locality and context. As Williams and Green argue: ‘good public



space is as dependent on the audience that perceives it, as it is on the type or quality of the space itself' (2001: 4). We ought to pay more attention towards the ways in which individuals interact with the public spaces of the city, to unpack its multiple perceived, conceived and lived dimensions, to explore how they become 'liveable' (or not).

The 'liveability' agenda is a key component of New Labour's urban renaissance. It is an idea encompassing a wide range of measures aimed at improving quality of life across communities for all citizens. However, what the term 'liveability' means also remains unclear. As recognised in the governmental report, *The State of the English Cities*: 'In the absence of a generally agreed definition, we follow the line set by the ODPM, seeing liveability as concentrating on the public realm and the built environment, in terms of both observed outcomes and citizens' perceptions of their local urban environment' (2006: 156).<sup>19</sup> Crucially, despite its somewhat woolly definition, 'liveability' is one of five key themes within the government's *Sustainable Community Agenda* (2003), aiming to create communities that are active, inclusive, well connected, thriving, well served and fair for everyone. However, the positive relationship between access to high quality public space and an increase in quality of life remains in the realm of the assumed as opposed to something proven.

The term 'liveability' was originally coined by the then US Vice President, Al Gore, to set out a political agenda which responded to the negative consequences of inner city areas becoming so neglected as to repel economically active citizens, who could simply afford to move out of cities to enjoy a 'higher quality of life' (Minton, 2003: 7). Ultimately the US 'liveability' agenda was seen as a key component of revitalising the city economy, and was criticised for encouraging the gentrification of city centres which favoured an increase in particular 'lifestyles' i.e. those of the affluent middle classes, failing to account for the quality of life of all urban dwellers and marginalising the poorer sections of society. As discussed earlier, some scholars have accused

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<sup>19</sup> This is an independent report commissioned by the government to fulfil its commitment to publishing a detailed update to the urban renaissance five years after the UWP.



New Labour of creating intentionally exclusionary policies.<sup>20</sup> Its liveability agenda can be understood as a key competitive element between cities in terms of attracting both people and business to the city.<sup>21</sup> It is therefore systematically discriminating in the types of people it aims to *attract*, despite being far reaching in the people that it can benefit. This brings us back to questions about which members of the public are welcomed in to the city public and what kind of 'public realm' is being promoted through the urban renaissance.

Time and again the importance of public space in contemporary living is articulated in policy documents under the rubric of 'well-being' and 'liveability', being positively related to citizens' 'quality of life' (ODPM, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, DCLG, 2006). However, British urban policy has been criticised for failing to appreciate the complexity of accounting for all members of the public within its urban renaissance agenda, wrongly assuming that all citizens have similar needs, desires and opportunities. Rogers and Coaffee charge that: 'Urban policy can often be seen to emphasise *'quality of life'* without ever focusing on the specific *'lifestyles'* of diverse user groups' (2005: 322, emphasis in original). According to Deutsche, formulated in the singular, 'the quality of life' assumes a universal city dweller that is equated with 'the public' - identities that the phrase actually invents (2002: 276). She proposes that categories like 'the public' can only be constructed as 'naturally or fundamentally coherent' by disavowing the conflicts, particularity, heterogeneity and uncertainty that constitutes social life (Deutsche, 2002: 259). The automatic assumption that access to public space is inherently beneficial, or even a possibility for all citizens, must be questioned.

That government policy discusses 'public space' as an arena in which 'the public', a supposedly indiscriminate group, can come together almost

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<sup>20</sup> Mitchell argues that the government (both national and local), in its drive to revitalise the city and promote 'liveability', has turned to 'the annihilation of space by law' (2001: 7). It has turned 'to legal remedies that seek to cleanse those left behind by globalisation and other secular changes in the economy by simply erasing those spaces in which they must live', it is engaged in a purification of space both commercially and residentially (Bannister, 2006: 925).

<sup>21</sup> As McCann argues: 'The contemporary great master of a great deal of popular and academic liveability research is the influential and highly popular neo-liberal vision of the city as a commodity that should be branded and marketed as part of a wider process of inter-urban competition' (2004: 1912).



harmoniously to linger in each other's presence, and even generate shared beliefs, is deservedly criticised. It views the role of public space through a utopian lens, associating its development with a move towards social justice and liberation for all citizens, a place where a sense of community is generated through face-to-face contact with all members of the public. However, academic literature often cites the potentially dystopian consequences of government policy. For example, Peck (2004) warns of a new urban policy reconfiguration based on social and racial containment, the purification of public spaces, the privatisation of social reproduction and pre-emptive 'crime control', with enormous implications for minority groups. Indeed, MacLeod argues: 'I find it hard to reason against the view that any conception of 'publicness' we ascribe to the new renaissance sites is highly selective and systematically discriminating' (2002: 605).

Urban policy often fails to recognise the essentially conflicting nature of cities, evoking public spaces as a neutral realm where all people can come together unproblematically. Following Amin et al., it seems that we need to acknowledge the interrelationship between power and spatial (re)production when developing public space policy because: 'Public space at its worst can be the site of one group's dominance over others. At best, it's a place of active engagement and debate' (2000: 3). Ultimately, cities and public spaces ought to be viewed as places of difference that include people with different interests, needs and desires; policy that fails to confront such a situation cannot possibly hope to address any underlying problems. In sum, by ignoring any possible conflicts of interest taking place in, across and throughout space, urban policy often fails to address issues of power which can prove definitive in (re)producing space as public and/or private in the first place.

One of the fundamental criticisms of both the UTF and UWP reports is the simplistic and underdeveloped framing vision they propose for British cities. Amin et al. argue that the way in which the UTF and UWP reports draw on as distinctive and comprehensive vision as any of 'the good city' problematic, claiming that: 'Cities are essentially culturally hybrid and inevitably conflictual.



This is part of their creative character and their dynamism. There is simply no point in imagining the future of cities in terms of their harmonious, consensual, 'solution' - a 'state' which can be arrived at' (Amin et al., 2000: vi). What is needed to create 'good cities' are mechanisms for ensuring the democratic control and management of what will necessarily, by the very nature of cities, be a constantly contested, changing and open future (Amin et al., 2000). Such ideas begin to hint at the complex and processual nature of the (re)production of cities and prove especially helpful when contemplating how to understand public space, from the way in which it is conceptualised, to how it is used, managed and designed. This will be a recurrent theme of subsequent chapters where it will be theoretically considered and empirically unpacked.

#### **2.4: Creating CAFE: Putting cities on the design agenda**

Under New Labour's urban renaissance, urban design is central to the delivery of successful cities and public spaces. In 1999, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and ODPM set up the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CAFE) to act as the government's advisor on architecture, urban design and public space. CAFE is a statutory body that claims to 'work for the public' by encouraging the creation of 'good cities through urban design' (CAFE website, 2006). As highlighted by their Chief Executive, Sir Stuart Lipton, CAFE view urban design as a key priority of, and mechanism for, progressive urban change: 'Good urban design is essential if we are to produce attractive, high-quality, sustainable places in which people will want to live, work and relax' (CAFE, 2000: 5). The formation of CAFE demonstrated New Labour's commitment to regenerating cities at large, and its pledge to put public spaces at the centre of the urban renaissance was further established through the creation of CAFE Space.

In April 2003, ODPM announced the formation of a specialised unit, CAFE Space, in order to: '...champion high quality planning, design and management and care of parks and public spaces, which will provide hands-on support to local authorities to apply best practice and improve the local environment' (CAFE, 2003). CAFE Space is a part of CAFE specifically dedicated to



strengthening the urban design skills and capacity of local governments, in the hope that such skills can be used to improve England's towns and cities. Through its policy and research, CABI Space seeks to build an evidence base to demonstrate the economic, social and environmental benefits of good quality public space, and use it to inform and influence thinking about how we plan, design, resource and manage these assets.

The proposed significance of urban design in the creation of successful cities has led to the publication of a wealth of government guidance promoting and offering advice via CABI - *By Design* (2000), *The Value of Urban Design* (2001), *Manifesto for Better Public Spaces* (2003) etc. According to this guidance, urban design is instrumental in creating sustainable developments and the conditions for flourishing economic life, for the prudent use of natural resources and for social progress.<sup>22</sup> Within government guidance, urban design is showcased not as design for design's sake, but as design that is about using every available tool in order to enhance the lives of citizens – especially in the public spaces of cities. CABI state that:

Good design can help create lively places with distinctive character; streets and clean public spaces that are safe, accessible, pleasant to use and human in scale; and places that that can inspire because of the human imagination and sensitivity of their designers. (2000: 8)

In brief, CABI and New Labour argue that urban design is both a product and a process of making places that are attractive to people.<sup>23</sup>

Urban design considers the way spaces work and matters such as community safety, as well as how aesthetically attractive they are. It highlights the importance of readdressing the aesthetics versus ethics balance by encouraging the construction of socially responsible developments as opposed

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<sup>22</sup> CABI proposes that the design of public space is a significant element in its usability and value. Recently, it has published many practice guides to educate professionals and the public on what constitutes good public space design. The guidance documents refer to a common set of design principles that have stemmed from *Responsive Environments* (Bentley et al., 1985). Overall, evidence suggests that places that are well integrated, legible, viable, robust (i.e. flexible) and 'respectful of local identity' will be most successful (CABI, 2001: 15).

<sup>23</sup> The redesigning of urban spaces to make them more inclusive, people-friendly and welcoming seems an unchallengeable public 'good'. However, as will be revealed in the empirical chapters of this thesis, the impacts of renaissance-style developments are by no means straightforward (Raco, 2003).



to environments based solely on their visual appeal (Harvey, 2006). Urban design evaluates the relationship between an area's structural form and its level of accessibility for different types of users. It can account for the connections between people and places, movement and urban form, nature and the built fabric, and the processes for ensuring successful public spaces, towns and cities (CABE, 2004). In sum, urban design is an activity that attempts to appreciate the complexity of the urban realm by considering the myriad of processes, practices and interrelations reproducing it.

CABE propose (and it is generally accepted) that the art of urban design is a movement away from some traditional city and town planning approaches that were founded on the belief that improvements in the physical infrastructure of the urban realm would equate to improvements in citizens' experience of it. It is a supposedly sophisticated process, accounting for the interaction between people and spaces so that the social element of the 'social production of social space' (as more fully explored in Chapter Five) can be considered. This bears specific relation to the design of public spaces. As highlighted by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF): 'The public life of places does not derive principally from their aesthetic design or who owns them, but from a combination of the quality of interaction between the people who use them and those who own them or manage them and the space itself' (2005: 8). Nevertheless, despite claims that it takes a 'people based approach to urban regeneration' (CABE, 2003), some argue that the urban renaissance is overly design-led (Amin et al., 2000; Holden and Iveson, 2003; Lees, 2003a).<sup>24</sup>

New Labour highlighted the importance of 'making places for people' (Blair, 2001) and has rhetorically moved away from assuming that well-designed public spaces will automatically encourage the public to use and/or feel some affinity to them. John Prescott, the then Deputy Prime Minister, noted the previous government's failure to stem urban decline precisely because it only addressed part of the urban problem by ignoring the underlying causes: 'Often

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<sup>24</sup> Amin et al. (2000) astutely note that one report, especially one focussed on design, could not be expected to include everything, but if this document is to be as central to the government's project as it seems, they argue that any shortcomings must be noted.



they forgot that urban policies are not just about bricks and mortar, but about improving the prosperity and quality of life for the people who live there. Towns and cities need to be looked at as a whole, in an integrated way' (ODPM, 2002). However, Miles argues that New Labour's reading of urban design in relation to public space is underdeveloped, leaving understandings of public space overly static. He states that: 'its belief that a better world might be engineered through design belongs to the modernist utopia, founded on a Cartesian objectification of space' (2005: 259).<sup>25</sup> For Miles, New Labour's intentions of placing urban design at the forefront of the urban renaissance were rational and just, however, its method relied on a separation of the concept from the experience and function of space.

At times government policy leans towards an environmentally deterministic approach to the development of public space, advocating that social problems such as crime can be 'designed-out', and social aspirations such as the coming together of strangers 'designed-in'. The intentions of urban design mechanisms are reflective of the types of 'public space' encouraged through the urban renaissance. CABI was commonly called the 'style police' by town planners and urban designers interviewed for this thesis, because of their strong influence over the types of design adopted within British cities, and the intended social impacts of the designs they promote. CABI's underlying argument is that well designed public spaces will encourage 'civilised' behaviours, foster social interactions and reduce the motivations and opportunities for anti-social, deviant or criminal behaviour.<sup>26</sup> However, by promoting specific types of urban regeneration, the urban renaissance facilitates the creation of public spaces that are 'user friendly' for a discriminate group of 'users'.

If urban design plays a fundamental role in 'making spaces for people', the types of people for whom such spaces are created must be accounted for.

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<sup>25</sup> The modernist utopia to which Miles refers is that of the 20<sup>th</sup> century architectural understandings of modernism, which will be discussed further in Chapter Seven in relation to design aspirations behind BALTIK.

<sup>26</sup> The Home Office Respect Action Plan (2006) is the latest development in this emerging 'politics of behaviour', which blurs the distinction between disruptive and criminal behaviour (Field, 2003).



Despite New Labour's proposal that cities should be designed with all members of 'the public' in mind, an investigation into what and who is being designed into/out of the city is revealing. Urban designers create public spaces with particular uses and practices in mind. For example, public space design is involved in debates about designing out risk in the city. However, the generic term 'risk' is used to encompass a selection of actions, behaviours, uses and practices which are often directly associated with marginal groups in society (for example the homeless, adolescents etc. – see Borden, 2001; Mitchell, 2001; Ruddick, 1996). Rolling benches, a lack of public toilet facilities, intermittent sprinkler systems and 'mosquito devices' – to name a few - are often designed into public spaces under the guise of being risk avoidance strategies. However, they are diversionary mechanisms aimed at removing particular groups (such as the homeless and youths) from public space, symptoms of the exclusionary vision of whom constitutes 'the public' held by many designers, managers and regulators of city centre spaces.

Whilst increases in compensation claims, litigation allegations and public safety are used to explain the increased attention to designing out risk, it is more likely that it is 'a superficial symptom of a deeper set of cultural issues reflecting our relationship with our surroundings' (Thrift, 2005: 1). Every one of us, every day, takes decisions about which areas to use alongside when and how we use them. Our perceptions of the quality and safety of the spaces we encounter influence these decisions. This is something which has arguably intensified in relation to the war on terror, and which is particularly acute in the aftermath of recent terrorist activities (see Coaffee, 2003, 2004; Graham, 2004, 2005). The substantial reduction in the number of people using the London underground after the 7<sup>th</sup> July bombings in 2005 and the existing fear that continues to circulate around the public transport of cities with the same regularity as the services themselves, illustrates how people's perception of space alters how they use it.

It needs to be considered how concerns over safety - or more accurately, 'security' – in cities have increasingly entered a public consciousness instilled



with a fear of the 'other'. Safety in public space, and for particular members of the public, has been sharpened in relation to the 'war on terror', and the fear that accompanies this 'war' is readily tinged with racial undertones. There has been a reported rise in hostility shown towards Middle Eastern males within the city of London and far wider geographical bases, specifically within the public spaces of cities. The ways in which certain groups and behaviours are pathologised within the dominant discourses of public space will be discussed more fully throughout this thesis, particularly in relation to sexuality in Chapter Six and cultural and financial capital in Chapter Seven. Certain groups become ostracised from public space through the dominant designs encoding space, whilst for others, the pre-programming of space equates to a loss of vitality and hence a reduction in attraction.

The simultaneous rise of risk and creativity agendas is one of the great paradoxes today, given that 'risk-avoidance strategies often cancel out inventiveness' (Landry, 2005: 7). As articulated by Newcastle City Council's Executive Member:

There is a conflict between making those very sterile and you know antiseptic featureless spaces. Pardon the tautology, but there is a risk of being too risk focused which local authorities sometimes seek to be. You risk losing what makes a space special, making things very bland and very safe so that they are no longer enjoyable.

(Stone, pers. comm., 2005)

In an era within which public spaces are being characterised as sterile and homogenous, where their creativity and spontaneity is arguably being diluted or eliminated, a pertinent challenge is to ensure that they retain an element of attraction, excitement and useability. However, people will not always use spaces in the ways that urban designers hope or anticipate.

No matter how wisely and imaginatively designers and architects create a space, 'each person will interpret it differently and consequently use it differently' - or perhaps even choose not to use it at all (Mean and Tims, 2005: 26). In order to have effective design and management of public spaces, it is essential to understand the role that these places play in people's lives and why spaces are ignored. An understanding of the 'purposes of public places and



their use by people' is essential to any speculation about their qualities (Carr, 1992: 87). Therefore, we ought to start with the *people* as opposed to the *space* when designing public space as it is the 'lived' dimension of public space which is perhaps most significant in determining whether or not a space can be considered 'public'. Such advances depend upon a deeper understanding of how people interact in public spaces throughout their everyday lives; their expectations of it; and the ways in which they create meaning in/from it. This thesis aims to get at the heart of such rich understandings of 'public space' by developing a critical spatial model to facilitate detailed empirical investigations.

Urban designers must not simply look at space as a blank canvas that can be successfully transformed into a thriving public space through physical construction alone. They must avoid favouring 'spatial form over social process' (Harvey, 1997: 2). Rather, the social, cultural, political and economic processes operating within the space itself and the wider environment in which it is situated must be considered in practice as well as on paper. On paper, urban design objectives are abstract and only have an impact on people's lives when translated into development (CABE, 2001). The form of buildings, structures and spaces is the physical expression of urban design; it is what influences the patterns of use, activity and movement in a space, and the experience of those who visit, live, and work there (CABE, 2001). However, while architects, landscape designers and planners prepare models and sketch out visions of golden futures, it is imperative that we do not forget that 'the physical city cannot be thought of in isolation from the social city' (Worpole and Greenhalgh, 1996: 10). As will be carefully considered in Chapters Four and Five, the way in which the social and the spatial are so thoroughly imbued with each other's presence means that their analytical separation quickly becomes a misleading exercise, must be considered in urban design policy guidance.

Whatever we think of the environment around us, we are influenced, consciously and otherwise, by the 'embedded cultural values of our built inheritance' (CABE, 2005: 40). Our buildings and public spaces reflect our values, beliefs, fears and hopes, and according to CABE 'they are the stuff



dreams [and nightmares] are made of' (2005: 46). There is much to be gained from developing approaches that go beyond traditional planning debates and start to engage with the things that people 'feel and care about in the places they live', to give expression to all that which so often goes unsaid or even unthought (CABE, 2005: 46). In order to get to the stage where rather than physical capital and design being a way to shape society, it could be a way for communities to shape themselves, there is a long way to go. A key issue we need to consider in relation to generating any essence of publicness in the development of public spaces is the multifarious needs and desires of such a complex body of individuals.

## **2.5: The public, public space, community and citizenship**

One of the crucial tenets of the UTF report, adopted by the UWP and subsequent guidance, is Rogers' belief that: 'People make cities but cities make citizens' (UTF, 1999). At the centre of this belief is a vision of the city as a prerequisite for and enabler of citizenship. Within the urban renaissance, the city is reinstated as a place where the rights and responsibilities of the nation's citizens can be activated, discussed and contested. Moreover, it is within the supposedly universally accessible public spaces of the city that citizenship is most clearly created, articulated and debated (Sennett, 1971) (this will be further discussed in Chapter Four).

Public spaces are a lynchpin of New Labour's urban renaissance - more specifically, the programme of the former ODPM and the current DCLG and Social Exclusion Unit.<sup>27</sup> Within British urban policy, there is a strong conviction that the provision of public spaces is instrumental in creating citizens and communities. Public spaces are touted as places offering citizens the opportunity to avoid the onslaught of disaffection perpetuated in an increasingly isolating and privatising urban realm. They are viewed as sites capable of providing the opportunity, and spatial arena, for meaningful contact with the stranger; a platform to air common concerns and express (or create) shared

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<sup>27</sup> The change over from ODPM to DCLG was perhaps unsurprising as from 2003 onwards the former ODPM was concentrating more and more on community and local government issues.



values.

Bound up with the increase in the significance of public space is a desire to include and involve 'the community' in the activities of the urban realm and city life in general. Community is the site of a particular kind of citizenship that dominates the UWP's prescriptions for urban policy reform.<sup>28</sup> It would be naïve and misleading to uncritically accept the term 'community' due to the numerous and complex issues raised by such a multiplicitous and contested term. However, in short, the government defines communities within urban policy in relation to spatial proximity, those other people quite literally living in your neighbourhood, town or city, arguably diminishing multi-scalar economic, political, social and environmental ties and networks to the local level, through spatial fix, for practical and/or logistical purposes.

National urban policy guidance is simultaneously obsessed with and ambiguous about the role of 'the public', 'local people' and 'local communities' (used interchangeably) in achieving an urban renaissance in Britain (DCLG, 2006). Successful urban renewal, it is emphasised repeatedly, relies on 'public participation'. The UWP argued for the need to move away from the previous inadequate consultation methods used in planning if we want to create successful public space and cities, stating: 'It is not enough to consult people about decisions that will impact on their lives; they must be fully engaged in the process from the start' (DETR, 2000: 32). Despite its detractors and the heavy criticism levelled against it, within government policy, community is both a product of, and a mechanism for, the development of successful public spaces. Community participation is essential to the development process if public spaces are to be successful. If places are for the people then the people must help make the places.

However, the use of the built environment to produce common (and commonly

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<sup>28</sup> Discourses of community are pivotal in framing the policy agenda for cities, and the core of New Labour's approach to the revitalisation of cities is the revival of citizenship and the activation of communities to spearhead urban change. As Blair has said: 'unless the community is fully engaged in shaping and delivering regeneration, even the best plans on paper will fail in practice' (SEU, 2000: 5).



valued) goods such as neighbourliness or community identity is fraught with difficulties; it 'depends absolutely on co-operation between designers, planners, owners and users', which in the past has depended on the supposed creation of a shared vision of a place (CABE, 2005: 34). In circumstances where the setting of the urban agenda cannot be seen as the expression of a harmonious consensus, the definition of a politics and a form of city planning that can bridge the gap between these multiple heterogeneities without repressing their inherent difference and tensions is argued by Harvey (2005) to be one of the biggest challenges. This 'call' for a new urban programme is faced with countless difficulties and obstacles to its realisation, since it runs counter to the established mechanisms of planning and would demand more participatory and sustainable priorities for development other than the one dominating at present (Groth and Corjin, 2005: 523).

It is crucial to consider whether contemporary shifts in participation present meaningful opportunities for citizens to play a significant role in urban transformation, or constrain the efforts of citizens and institutions of civil society to engage in other scales of policy decision making where *real* changes can be implemented (Elwood, 2005). In order to consider the issue, the questions of how participation is conceptualised and implemented in urban policy must be explored. A valuable starting point is to think about what the term 'participation' means, as this directly influences how 'the public' is considered (as well as prefigured) in the creation of urban policy and, hence, urban public space.

At its most basic, participation is about inclusion in society, being able to participate in all the activities regarded as 'normal' and having the opportunity to do so. Because having access to public space influences whether or not people feel included in society, the government has generated a great deal of enthusiasm about involving the public in its creation. As noted by Bianchini and Schwengel:

Use value, local control and the preservation of cultural identity are indeed three objectives which should inspire any attempt at reimagining local democracy. These objects will not be attained by social or political engineering, but rather by creating multiple structures of local accountability and real opportunities for political



participation.

(1990: 233)

In order to provide services that best meet the needs of citizens, public participation in the 'policy process' through which decisions about the 'formulation, implementation and evaluation of services are made can be seen to be integral to success' (Burton et al., 2005: 31).

Participatory methods are portrayed as encouraging community involvement at the inception of development, asking communities what they want from their surrounding environment and the kinds of spaces they actually desire, as opposed to requesting them to select their preferred option from a pre-constructed set of designs. Within a democratic society, participatory methods are considered far superior to consultation processes in creating socially just and liberating cities (Pain, 2006). 'Participation' alludes to the potential for 'the public' to make constructive differences to the way in which 'its communities' are developed and regenerated. Such glossy rhetoric of participation sets the scene in which members of 'the public' are key stakeholders within the urban realm and therefore a key concern for urban developers.

The UWP is explicit in its proposed commitment to community participation in the planning process, claiming: 'No one knows a place better than the people who live and work there, they must be at the heart of the process to develop a strategy that will work in the area' (DETR, 2000: 34). On paper, 'the public' is to be included in the planning process not merely because of the moral conscience or democratic obligation of the government, but also to facilitate the development of more successful public spaces, communities and cities - after all, they are, and will be, the key users of these arenas. However, the use of rhetoric to signify a move away from the culture of peripatetic expertise towards favouring locally embedded knowledge and priorities have been criticised by some as insincere, merely paying lip service to the cause (Holden and Iveson, 2003).

Overall New Labour's approach to community participation is very broad and involves a combination of legislative requirements and more general



encouragement of community involvement. In *Modern Local Government: In touch with the people*, the government stated that it 'wishes to see consultation and participation embedded into the local culture of all councils' (DETR, 1998: 39). As a result, local authorities were required to adopt new political structures, under the Local Government Act (2000), and were subject to change not only in their structures and ways of working, but also in the statutory duties expected of them. For example, councils now have to engage with residents (classed as the public) over a wide range of issues, including: Strategic Plans (SPs), Community Plans (CPs) and Local Development Frameworks (LDFs). However, such engagements have also been criticised as modernistic and mere tick box procedure. Imrie and Raco claim that the key to the urban renaissance is found 'not by recourse to lay viewpoints per se; rather it is to draw on the knowledge of architects, designers and planners' (as discussed above) to enhance the public spaces and the lives of the communities (2003: 26).

New Labour has responded to criticisms of tokenism levelled against it. In 2004, the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act introduced a planning system for England. A key objective of the new system is to strengthen community involvement in planning decisions.<sup>29</sup> Local authorities are required to produce a Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) as one of the first steps towards this. The regulations state that all Development Plan Documents (DPDs) and Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) must be accompanied in their final stages by a SCI - a pre-submission consultation statement for the former and a consultation statement for the latter. The statement in each case must set out who has been involved, how they were consulted, a summary of the issues raised and how these have been addressed.

Some bodies claim that this is clear evidence that the public are now welcomed into the planning process as key stakeholders. For example, in its LDF

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<sup>29</sup> Holden and Iveson (2003) have convincingly argued that there is a 'paradox at the heart of New Labour's urban policy'. The paradox is that a good-quality urban public realm is seen to be necessary for fostering social cohesion and community, and yet improvement in the quality of the public realm seems to require the pre-existence of social cohesion and community- things which are arguably found wanting in many existing urban realms.



Newcastle City Council states: 'The Council intends to take an inclusive approach [to planning], seeking to involve everybody and to do so in a way that everybody can understand' (NCC, 2003: 1). Others state that despite repeated assertions that urban-policy is now community-focused and oriented towards the involvement and activation of local knowledge in the policy process, the practices of urban governance remain highly centralised and output focused (Imrie and Raco, 2003; Johnstone and Whitehead, 2004).<sup>30</sup> Imrie and Raco argue that: 'Communities are often 'shoehorned' on to local policy initiatives according to central government guidelines, and this is limiting the effectiveness of programmes on the ground' (2003: 27).

Despite incessant reference to 'participation' within governmental documents, there is uncertainty as to exactly what participation means and involves in the everyday planning process. In creating public space, for participation to be meaningful and successful, policies and their implementers have to be clear what it means for each initiative and for all those involved. If, at the policy formulation stage, the focus is blurred, then this is likely to be translated into the implementation and policy outcome stages. If participation processes are opaque and indecipherable, it is highly unlikely that the government will be successful in encouraging the active citizenship it claims to require for the creation of socially just cities.

The rhetoric of 'local community' and 'active citizenship' is dominant within the discourses of New Labour's social and urban policies (Brannan et al., 2006). In the urban renaissance agenda, the assumption is that the empowerment and mobilisation of communities is central to spearheading change (Imrie and Raco, 2003; Johnstone and Whitehead, 2004). It is an attempt at refashioning the individualistic and elitist kind of active citizenship promoted by the previous Tory governments throughout the late 1980s and early 1990s.<sup>31</sup> Imrie and Raco

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<sup>30</sup> Mean and Tims (2005) argue that due to the lack of explicit guidelines in urban policy regarding local consultation, vague best practice requirements for the content and practice of SCI become sidelined throughout the consultation process.

<sup>31</sup> The Conservative's definition of 'active citizenship' derived from individualistic moral responsibility. It did not recognise other possible interpretations of citizenship, which prioritise the eradication of social inequality, the fostering of political participation, the extension of effective rights and entitlements to wider sections of the community, and the transfer of power



state that: 'Modernising Britain, in Blairite terms, requires a re-articulation of active citizenship, with the state role moving from that of a provider of services, to that of a facilitator – enabling communities and individuals to take more responsibility for the conduct of their own lives' (2003: 1).<sup>32</sup>

There is a strong link between the restoration of quality urban public spaces and the 'recreation of a sense of identity and local citizenship' (Amin et al., 2000: 32). New Labour's active citizenship purportedly consists of more than simply increasing the level of public participation for its own sake: '...it demands participation with a purpose. That purpose is to engage people in making their communities better places for themselves and those around them' (Stoker, 2004: 2). Unlike previous Conservative governments, New Labour's active citizenship is about engaging people in decision-making processes, giving them a say in the planning and delivery of public services (such as the provision of public space), and 'involving them and their communities, as a means to improve outcomes' (Brannan, 2006: 993).<sup>33</sup> New Labour promotes 'active citizenship' as a way of encouraging the development of better public policies and hence better public spaces, but critics quite rightly question this simplistic unilateral relationship.

As highlighted by Brannan et al.: 'engaging people can make a difference', however, the process of obtaining beneficial outcomes is 'somewhat more complex than policy advocates sometimes imply' (2006: 994). For Brannan et

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from the centre to locally based and accountable elected bodies (i.e. that of New Labour's notion of citizenship) (Bianchini and Schwengel, 1991).

<sup>32</sup> New Labour's notion of active citizenship may appear at first to be similar to that of the previous Conservative governments with its delegation of responsibility for welfare from the state to individual citizens. However, under the Tories, an individual's compulsion to be active and responsible was believed to come from their 'personal morality' and the prospect of the approval of similar others, rather than from feelings of 'community belonging' and 'communal endeavour' (Kearns, 1995: 159). New Labour, of a different political persuasion, believed that the two could be combined. For it, citizens should not only act on their own morality and with the aim of seeking respect from others, but should also show respect towards others with the longer term ambition of generating a sense of 'community belonging' and 'communal endeavour' (SEU, 2001).

<sup>33</sup> Kearns (1995) and Philo (1995) argued that the kind of active citizenship promoted by the Tory governments did not aim for a 'politically vocal' or 'engaged citizenship', but rather a 'politically uninterested' public. In fact, Tory active citizenship was effectively silent about the assertion of positive citizenship rights e.g. the emphasis of education for citizenship in schools 'was based on obligation not rights' (Kearns, 1995: 175).



al., the main criticism is that public policy developers do not accept that there is a distinction that should be made between intrinsic benefits - those conferred by the process of participation - and instrumental benefits - those that affect outcomes. Proponents of participation focus overwhelmingly on the intrinsic benefits, including: personal feelings of inclusion and self-esteem (Burton et al., 2004); developing knowledge and capacity (Barnes, 1999); and generating innovative ideas (Dibben and Bartlett, 2001). This focus is reflected in numerous studies of public involvement and is based on normative claims about the values associated with participating practices. From this perspective, such practices are 'inherently valuable' and therefore require no justification (Burton et al., 2004; Brannan, 2006: 995). However, the actual quality of the outcomes of increased participation is something that needs to be addressed, and was a key issue raised by several of the town planners interviewed for this research.

Some of the town planners interviewed for this research were sceptical about the value of the role of 'the public' in the planning process. This was displayed by their lack of support for, and conviction in, involving the public in technical procedures, as illustrated by the hyperbolic comments of one town planner who exhaled:

If I needed a brain transplant I would hardly go out into the street and ask a member of the public to do it for me. At the end of the day, I'm a professionally qualified urban designer and town planner. I'm an expert. I know how a city runs and know a lot more than your average guy on the street about how to design a city, that's what I'm paid for. (Howe, pers. comm., 2005)

In theory, lay public involvement in the planning process is championed as a progressive step; however, in practice it does not always affect processes on the ground. The extent of public involvement in the planning process is highly dependent upon the views of the professional individuals involved in activating this process and the perceived abilities and confidence of the local public to get involved in the first place.

Engaging citizens and giving them a greater say in implementing policies, creates significant logistical challenges for local authorities and will require



structural and administrative changes and staff training. Moreover, these processes challenge existing ways of working and the power structures that underpin these. Following Brannan et al.: 'The complexities involved in engaging people in civic processes and structures, and in deriving the proposed benefits from this, must be recognised and made more explicit if the renewal of the civic is to be anything more than a rhetorical device' (2006: 1004). Issues surrounding how to get people involved, representativeness, and individual and institutional capacities, persist and must be addressed, in both specific processes and more generally (Brannan, 2004).<sup>34</sup> It is primarily at the level of local government that such considerations need to be evaluated, as this is the level of delivery. However, local government works within the broader strategic agenda of national policy, therefore, the overall aims and ambitions of New Labour must also be assessed.

## **2.6: Activating the New Localism**

One of the key characteristics of New Labour's urban agenda is the centrality of local government in the delivery of national urban policy. National government assumes that the local government has the ability to deliver the 'good cities' it promised.<sup>35</sup> There is a firm belief that urban transformation will only be successful where local authorities are well managed and politically committed to national initiatives. As stated by the then Deputy Prime Minister, John Prescott:

Government can and will take the lead but the solutions will be invariably local. We need to give local leaders and decision makers the power to get the job done. Those responsible will know what action they should take to deliver the cleaner, safer, greener spaces that everyone has the right to expect. (ODPM, 2002)

Local government must adapt national guidance to meet the needs of local people when developing public space. Their role in the land use planning

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<sup>34</sup> CABE believes that there is a significant scope for greater involvement of local communities in the design and management of public spaces. However, care must be taken to ensure the results are of a high enough quality to continue to meet community needs over time. Communities must be 'given appropriate professional and technical support in their efforts to improve their local environment' (CABE, 2006:1).

<sup>35</sup> The centrality of local government in the delivery of the urban renaissance across England has been criticised by some (Imrie and Raco, 2003) who argue that the delegation of responsibilities to local government highlights the lack of enthusiasm and motivation within central government to carry out the delivery of their urban agenda.



system and in the maintenance of public space, as well as their own investment in the built environment, gives councils a 'high degree of social control and responsibility' over the 'physical make up' of the world around them (CABE, 2004: 3). There is no single blueprint for achieving better public spaces; such spaces depend upon contextual conditions.<sup>36</sup>

Planning advice for public open space at a national level comes primarily from Planning Policy Guidance Notes (PPGs) (2008). PPG1 is the most relevant for public space, stating:

Urban design should be taken to mean the relationship between different buildings and the streets, squares, parks and waterways and other spaces that make up the public domain itself; the relationship of one part of a village, town or city with other parts; and the patterns of movement and activity which are thereby established: in short, the complex relationships between all the elements of built and unbuilt space.

The challenge in PPG1 is clear: 'good design should be the aim of all those involved in the development process and should be encouraged everywhere'. However, national guidance encapsulates many broad suggestions and ideas without being clear about what they mean. For example, what is 'good urban design'? Who are the 'people involved in the design process'? That government guidance appears to 'say so much by saying very little' (Crilley, pers. comm., 2005) is unhelpful for those directly engaged in the planning process. By leaving the question of what the guidance means open, there is the possibility for confusion at the local level.

New Labour's return to power brought transformational structural changes to the British planning system. As stated by one of Newcastle City Council's town planners: 'In 1997, planning powers were taken away from the privately run, financially driven Urban Development Corporations and thankfully handed back to the relevant public authorities who could start to look at urban issues in their entirety' (Croft, pers. comm., 2005). From 1997, local Councils, as the local

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<sup>36</sup> According to CABE, there are, however, a number of factors, which are clearly significant. Strong, mutually beneficial partnerships must be established. This holds just as true within the council itself- between 'political leaders and professional leaders'- as between 'local authorities and external bodies,' as will be discussed shortly (CABE, 2004:3).



planning authority, had a statutory duty to prepare a Unitary Development Plan (UDP) that set out the council's policies and proposals for land use, transport and the environment. The UDP system provided a context for the consideration of applications for planning permission, stipulating the basic requirements that new developments had to meet. Although the UDP was prepared under regulations and advice produced nationally, the detailed content reflected local circumstances, as each council was required to draw up its own individually tailored UDP.

Some commended New Labour's fresh approach to planning, which emphasised the importance of taking the micro-scale dynamics of areas into account by considering the concerns and the needs of their public, but the complex nature of making changes to the UDP was heavily criticised for slowing down the development process (Imrie and Raco, 2003).<sup>37</sup> With the urban renaissance agenda underway, national government wanted to remove any obstacles getting in the way of their crusade for urban transformation, in a sense harking back to the days of purportedly non-bureaucratic, buccaneering UDCs of the 1980s and early 1990s.

In 2004, the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act introduced major reforms to the UDP system. A Local Development Framework (LDF) that featured a new set of Local Development Documents (LDDs) to deliver the council's integrated spatial strategy replaced the complicated and lengthy Local Plans and Structures of the UDP.<sup>38</sup> As explained by one of the town planners: 'The LDF is essentially a folder with a number of documents within it and the idea is that any one of those documents can be reviewed at a time, rather than doing the whole lot at once' (Howe, pers. comm., 2005). The new LDF had a number of key features, including fast-tracking planning decisions by reducing the amount of material to review for each application; however, the ability to speed

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<sup>37</sup> The complex processes of making changes to urban documents is a reflection of the broader criticism of the over-complicated nature of working through the multiple layers of government to make any changes at all to local plans in the first place.

<sup>38</sup> The LDF is a spatial plan i.e. it goes beyond the scope of traditional development plans concentrated on land use and deciding planning applications. Instead, the LDF focuses on desired outcomes and how they will be achieved through a variety of means.



up planning application decisions is not central to this thesis.<sup>39</sup> New Labour proposes that a sense of pride in place, and enjoyment of a liveable city are closely connected with the quality and visual distinctiveness of locality. The LDF provides the opportunity for a fresh approach to design based on a comprehensive and consistent response to local character and circumstances. In relation to this research, the most significant features of the LDF process are how it 'empowers the local community', 'takes the public into account' and 'listens to the people'.

Within the LDF, the notion of community consultation is developed and local authorities 'now have a duty to consult with the public whoever they may be'. However, when interviewing a senior town planner, the legitimacy of this commitment was drawn into question, as he talked about how the public were considered in the planning process: 'From day one we start developing options with them. We're not actually saying 'what do you want us to do?' From my understanding, we are saying we can do this, this or this' (Croft, pers. comm., 2005). Such comments are linked to the debates raised above, which suggested that the public has a choice of preferred options as opposed to being given free reign to make direct decisions as to exactly what their communities will look like. Whereas the need for technical and professional expertise within the urban design process is a pre-requisite to successful development, the extent to which the public have the ability to effect planning decisions at the point of inception (something condemned by some as highly problematic), as proposed by national government, is highly questionable.

Central government delegates the delivery of the urban renaissance agenda to the local government, claiming that it puts the community at the centre of future urban development in their locality. By allowing for the delivery of national policies at the local level through the formulation and implementation of site-specific programmes, the process is assumed to be more transparent and inherently more democratic. The delegation of planning responsibilities to local

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<sup>39</sup> All of the LDDs have to be in line with the Core Strategy of the local authority, a plan created to reflect national and regional policy guidelines and programmes. When creating a planning application, it need only be considered in relation to the relevant LDD (divided by area) and the Core Strategy as opposed to all of the LDDs and all regional and national guidance.



authorities is integrally linked to attempts at the generation of social cohesion, a sense of community and the facilitation of a regime supposedly encouraging active citizenship and community participation. Local government is viewed as being a scale which can incorporate 'the public' into its considerations, a level at which potential exclusions can be more easily identified and combated i.e. the 'new localism' (DCLG, 2006).

As stated by Holden and Iveson:

While the business of the urban renaissance is framed by strategies for the re-scaling of urban governance, the question of how community-led regeneration is to be energised, orchestrated and managed is fundamentally an empirical question. The agendas, practices and politics of regeneration projects are not settled in advance. Rather, they unfold in the increasingly complex field of multi-level governance. (2003: 66)

The impact of multi-level governance, incorporating governmental and non-governmental actors at a variety of scales, plays a key role in the development of public space, and is something that will become apparent throughout the thesis. A simple scaling down of planning decisions to the local level cannot eradicate some of the intrinsic difficulties of ensuring that the urban renaissance is beneficial for all sections of society.

Purcell warns that: 'As we discover, narrate and invent new ideas about democracy and citizenship in cities it is critical to avoid the local trap, in which the local scale is assumed to be inherently more democratic than other scales' (2006: 1921).<sup>40</sup> Following Purcell, it would seem like this is especially pertinent in relation to the urban renaissance, where the devolution of authority to the local level is based on the assumption that such a move will produce greater democracy. As highlighted above, the assumption is that the more autonomy the local people i.e. 'the public' have over their local urban area (especially the public spaces of that area), the more democratic and just decisions about that

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<sup>40</sup> Purcell and Brown (2005) first used the term 'local trap' in the context of development studies literature. It refers to the tendency of academics, policy researchers and activists to assume something inherent about the local scale. The local trap equates the local with 'the good'; it is preferred presumptively over other non-local scales. McCann (2003) argues that it is dangerous to make any assumption about any scale. Scales are not independent entities with pre-given characteristics. Instead they are socially constructed strategies to achieve particular ends (Purcell, 2006)



space will be.

The assumption that the local is desirable is not always true. As Purcell goes on to argue: 'The local trap treats localisation as an end in itself since it is conflated with the good, rather than as a means to an end such as democracy, justice or sustainability' (2006: 1927). Localisation is not simply the means through which the planning process can be democratised. Even at the local level, there are various stakeholders, each with their own needs, ambitions and intentions. Therefore, the role of particular individuals, community groups, business interests, and local councils (the list is endless) is fundamental to the creation of socially just or liberating policy and/or policy outcomes, as when devolved to the local scale such results depend on the agenda of those empowered by that given scalar strategy. The formulation of inclusive policy initiatives does not mean that all members of the public have an equal ability, opportunity or desire to become involved in the implementation of such policies.

## **2.7: Power with or without accountability: The multiple stakeholders of public space**

ODPM (2003) noted that responsibility for public space is shared, and many organisations and individuals - not just the local authorities - directly influence the quality of the spaces around us. Responsibility for public space policy is spread across central government departments and agencies. Although 'the public' generally identifies local authorities as responsible for managing and maintaining public spaces, there is a fragmented system of ownership, statutory roles and management responsibilities at the local level.<sup>41</sup> One consequence of this fragmentation is that public space issues are seldom looked at as a whole. Even when public spaces are created, in the long-term maintenance issues involved are frequently overlooked.

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<sup>41</sup> At the local level, responsibility for policy development and implementation has not been entirely reverted to local authorities, as was the case in earlier rounds of urban policy. Instead, as Imrie and Raco highlight: 'it has shifted to a range of supra-local organisations based on partnerships, including Neighbourhood Renewal Teams, Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) and Regional Development Agencies (RDAs), all operating under central control guidance' (2003: 17).



The provision of management services for public space continues to be divided across traditional lines, with distinct, separate groups of services that operate without a coordinating strategy. Compartmentalised professional 'silo' working between parks, leisure, planning, highways and street maintenance service are typical, irrespective of whether or not they are under a single directorate. This is something that a number of local authority interviewees raised as problematic, as discussed by one planner: 'It's very hard to create successful public spaces unless all of the elements of that space are considered over time' (Wyatt, pers. comm., 2005). To design, build and maintain successful public spaces, a large number of people will be involved in the process, influencing the types of space created. A comprehensive view of public space ought to account for the multiple stakeholders involved in its (ongoing) production.

Purdue (2001) notes that, despite the plethora of urban regeneration literature highlighting the increasing role of local government and private corporations, specifically through public-private partnerships, the individual role of 'leaders' has historically been underplayed. Recently, however, the fundamental importance of dynamic individuals in creating 'good cities' is widely accepted. As proposed by Hemphill et al., the new form of 'participative local governance' will only be successful if the leadership which drives it forward is competent and ensures that the appropriate individuals have a say in the regeneration of their areas (2006: 65).

Within the urban renaissance agenda, the talent and flair of key individuals is a pre-requisite for the creation of good cities and public spaces that are accessible and attractive. As stated by CABI: 'Visionary and determined individuals are crucial to achieving quality public space' (2004: 6). Competent and creative individuals within the realm of urban policy formulation, implementation and management are necessary to provide the inspiration, vision, guidance, support, resources, skills and impetus to make the urban renaissance work. Whereas the importance of urban designers, planners, policy developers and members of the public has been discussed, there is one key individual within the urban renaissance that warrants discussion for their



fundamental role in the design, maintenance and creation of public spaces in the urban realm - the City Centre Manager (CCM) and/or Town Centre Manager (TCM).

Newcastle's Executive Member claimed that CCMs could provide a solution to the logistical and communicative problems created by departmental overlap in interest and responsibility for public space:

You need key drivers within the Council otherwise you just plan things on a piecemeal basis and you don't think about the bigger picture. Whereas there are a number of individuals that play a fundamental role in public space concerns, the City Centre Manager is employed precisely to combat such problems. (Stone, 2005)

The primary function of CCMs is to represent the interests of local corporate and business stakeholders within the civic governance process. They are part of the regulation and governance practices associated with the introduction of Town Centre Management Groups (TCMGs) and, more recently, Business Improvements Districts (BIDs) – ideas imported from the US (Coleman, 2004).<sup>42</sup>

TCMs/CCMs, like TCMGs and BIDs, have an effect upon city centre public spaces vis-à-vis the influence of public-private partnership working. They aim to create the circumstances conducive for market-led regeneration resulting in minimum public regeneration processes, often at the expense of the creation of potentially exclusionary commercial services and landscapes (see Coleman, 2004). There is less concern in City Centre Management with civic interests than with business interests. As such, CCMs play a key role in the ongoing place marketing of city centres as sites for economic activity and cultural experience, bringing together commercial and civic investment for the purpose of marketing the local area, stimulating closer public-private partnerships, and developing City Centre Management over the long term.

Whereas the CCM/TCM of a local authority is only one key individual within

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<sup>42</sup> TCMGs were introduced in 2003 and BIDs in 2004. According to Coleman (2004), they highlight the continuing influence of the previous UDCs ways of regenerating cities. He argues that because they are primarily involved in 'investing collectively in local improvements to enhance their trading environment'; TCMGs and BIDs are exclusive in the types of people that they aim to attract and hence are 'exclusionary environments' (Coleman, 2004: 173).



urban development, their role highlights some of the main shortcomings of the 'mismatch between lived reality and rhetoric' within the urban renaissance (Lees, 2003d).<sup>43</sup> Key amongst the pitfalls with CCM is the growing tendency to treat non-consuming members of the public as a problem to be solved, rather than as a democratic electorate to whom they should be accountable. This is an implicit issue demonstrated through the effects of entrepreneurial urban policy: 'CCM demonstrates a powerful tendency on the part of many local authorities of seeing users as consumers...this leads to the implementation of management policies and techniques that can only be regarded as a form of social control' (Reeve, 1996: 61).

The ways in which social control mechanisms are enforced through the standardisation of certain moral codes and social norms, and the exclusionary consequences of such mechanisms in relation to public space are discussed throughout the thesis. Such forms of social control have a dramatic effect on the social (re)production of public space, prioritising consumer rights over citizenship rights (see Chapter Four). These accusations are further developed by those who argue that the public sector increasingly plays a facilitative, rather than a managerial role in urban regeneration; establishing the policy frameworks in and through which private developers invest (Raco and Imrie, 2003).

In the mid-1990s, there appeared to be much optimism around increasing new ventures between public and private bodies, and the host of new opportunities presented by them. Mulgan claimed that a flush of funds from sources as varied as the European Commission and the National Lottery had 'revived the activity of urban planners, and fuelled increasingly confident partnerships between private and public sectors' (1996: 7). However, with the frequently negative and exclusionary impacts of such developments being felt across

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<sup>43</sup> There are just over 50 CCMs/TCMs throughout Britain as they depend upon commercial investment to pay their salary. Only locales, such as Newcastle, that are open to commercial investment and the defence of commercial interests are successful in generating such income. Due to the commercial nature of the salaries paid to CCMs/TCMs, there is perhaps little wonder that they are often accused of being commercially driven and biased towards corporate interests in the debate around profits and equity within the urban realm.



contemporary cities, the optimism with which they were initially embraced has, in some cases, turned into acute suspicion and even outright disgust (MacLeod, 2002). Nevertheless, the future of the city resides, so it seems, in embracing an entrepreneurial stance in which state architect, urbanist and entrepreneur join forces to construct urban 'growth machines' that permit successful development and a vigorous competitive stance in the spiralling interurban competition that governs urban dynamics today.

According to Swyngedouw and Kaika: 'Within this market-led urban development, attention to issues of distribution and socio-economic power shrink and pervasive mechanisms of exclusion, social polarization and diminishing citizenship come to the fore' (2003: 6-7). New Labour's policy design for urban renaissance does not permit a critical questioning of the market, because the operations of unfettered markets are the basis upon which urban policy is supported. Likewise, it is not surprising to see little or no critical enquiry of the role of corporate or business interests in contributing to the urban renaissance. Rather, the Labour government 'socially constructs the actions of the business community to be pivotal to the renaissance of cities' (Imrie and Raco, 2003: 30). That this has a dramatic impact upon the nature of the 'public spaces' of the contemporary urban realm will be further discussed throughout this thesis.

## **2.8: Conclusion**

This chapter has argued that there is a mutually dependent relationship between how public space is 'thought' in urban policy and the types of 'material' public spaces that are developed in the urban realm. The renewed significance of towns and cities under New Labour's urban renaissance has turned around the fortunes of public space. As opposed to being viewed as a financial drain on the public purse, public spaces have become a tool for, and a preferred outcome of, the creation of the 'good cities' promised by New Labour. In government guidance, 'public space' is associated with improving social cohesion, strengthening community values, increasing environmental sustainability and improving citizens' quality of life. Whilst expectations for



public space are high, exactly what these spaces are, what they can realistically achieve and the most suitable mechanisms and practices for drawing 'the public' into development processes to encourage widespread use, remains unclear. This lack of clarity translates into confusion for those involved in delivering 'public space', which in turn affects the nature of the spaces developed.

Despite being harnessed as a metaphor of social and spatial inclusion, the 'urban renaissance' is under girded by an exclusionary commercial ideology. New Labour promotes processes of private-led gentrification as the preferred strategy to roll out the urban renaissance. This is problematic as the commercial nature of the landscapes produced through private investment contrasts with the types of openly accessible public spaces promised by government. The centrality of urban design within the liveability agenda is equally disconcerting. Whilst a renewed focus on the interrelationship between the spatiality of the city and the types of sociability encouraged within such spaces is positive, New Labour's approach to urban design is overly environmentally deterministic. CABI is insightful in its promotion of putting people rather than spaces at the centre of the urban renaissance, but this relationship needs further consideration to appreciate the diverse ways in which different spaces in/exclude specific users.

If public spaces are to provide the potential for the demonstration of sociability and civility on a large scale, we need to understand what 'the public' want from public spaces. The government must give citizens the chance to become involved not only in the activities provided in public spaces, but also in developing the conceptions and designs framing their development. New Labour is strong on the rhetoric of community involvement and inclusion in the regeneration processes transforming the everyday city. Unfortunately, how the individuals driving these processes carry out such procedures in practice is far less convincing. Effective practices and mechanisms that can draw 'the public' meaningfully into regeneration processes need to be formulated and institutionally ingrained. If members of the public are to become more



effectively involved in regeneration processes, they require the opportunity to develop the appropriate skills. Likewise, the devolution of planning decisions down to the local level must not be considered as a successful end in itself, but as an opportunity to create a more efficient and effective system to drive the urban renaissance. Local government requires support alongside the instructions of central government as to how to create 'liveable' cities and successful urban realms.

We must acknowledge the role of key individuals and multiple stakeholders in delivering the urban renaissance. Insightful, contextually aware and socially conscious individuals are of central importance in ensuring the creation of successful urban landscapes. As argued by McCann: 'While collaborative visioning techniques can play a part in changing the nature of the future urban geographies, the question of which interests have power over the processes themselves is crucial to the geographies produced' (2001: 208). In the context of current debates on the 'Renaissance' of British cities and the creation of more 'Sustainable Communities', the need for more empirical research is required to understand how urban policies and regeneration practices play out and transform the everyday spaces of cities. Such investigations can reassess the success of urban public policy in meeting the aims and objectives it sets out to achieve, and even question the desirability of such aspirations in the first place. However, urban policy is only one dimension influencing the form and functions of contemporary public space and must be understood in conjunction with many other processes affecting the everyday nature of city spaces. It is the methodological framework required to understand how public spaces of the city are (re)produced in everyday life, and to evaluate the nature of such spaces, to which this thesis now turns.



## Chapter 3

### Methodology: Researching contemporary urban public space

#### 3: Introduction

The previous chapter charted the rising importance of public space within New Labour's urban policy agenda. Thriving public spaces were exposed as both a preferred mechanism for, and an intended outcome of, a successful 'urban renaissance'. After critically discussing the political and institutional framework structuring policy visions of urban public space, Chapter Two argued that a clearer understanding of the nature of these spaces is needed. A fuller comprehension and appreciation of the complexity of everyday public space is essential if New Labour (or indeed any other stakeholder) is to begin to understand how such realms figure within the minds and lives of citizens. This thesis aspires to serve this need, in part, through the generation of new empirical insights into the impacts of how public spaces are designed, used, managed and regulated on their overall form and function.

The qualitative methodology and methods used to investigate and evaluate everyday 'flesh and stone' interactions taking place within, and activating, contemporary public spaces provide the focus of this chapter (Sennett, 1994). Following Hoggart et al.: 'By method I mean actual data collection and analysis, and by methodology I mean the bedrock views on the nature of 'reality' (ontology) and knowledge (epistemology) on which methods are founded' (2002: 1). In response to the increasing call for urban geographers to make their fundamental research decisions more transparent to the reader (Lees, 2003c; Rose, 1997), the discussion of the research process is intentionally extensive. This chapter starts by outlining the ontological and epistemological approaches inspiring the research methodology, and then goes on to critically explore each of the methods to be used.

As noted by Brewer: 'qualitative research is very easy to do, but it is very hard



to do well' (2000: 16). Whilst the overall evaluation of research quality largely lies out with my control, this chapter documents the attempts I made to produce rigorous findings by outlining the research principles I adopted. The research conducted was a reflexive process through which I made influential decisions and changes in an attempt to develop a high quality, scrupulous and focused research project. To allow the reader to follow how and why I made and justified these decisions, the key methodological changes are discussed. From the outset, I accepted that the relationship between the research methodologies, the project's aims and objectives and the overall research findings must stand up to scrutiny. This chapter illustrates the significance of a sound research methodology in attempting to understand public spaces within an 'everyday urbanism' (Amin and Thrift, 2002: 9).

### **3.1: Methodological Considerations: Generating research data**

As argued by Shurmer-Smith: '...it should be obvious that contemporary geographers are acutely conscious that their task is not a simple matter of studying an out-there reality' (2002: 17). The way one goes about the area of study, the ideological position one operates from, the way one relates to the subject matter, all contribute not just to one's style of working and representation, but also to the creation of a new research project. Subsequently, the methodology used to generate a research project underpins any empirical or theoretical claims that can be made. To ignore methodology is to assume that knowledge comes from nowhere or is somehow value-neutral, allowing the creators, shapers and relayers of knowledge to abdicate responsibility from their productions and representations. To side-step methodology means that the mechanisms we utilise in producing knowledge are hidden, relations of privilege are masked and researchers are not seen to be located: therefore the likely abundance of cultural, social, educational and economic capital is not recognised as central to the production of knowledge.

Dey argues that all data, regardless of method, is 'produced' by researchers who are neither distant nor detached, since they make various choices about



research design, location and approach which help to 'create' the data they end up generating (1993: 15). As a researcher, one does not simply work out where to find data that already exist in a collectable state. Instead, one works out how they can best generate data from the chosen sources. For this reason, the term 'methodology' in qualitative research implies more than a practical technique or procedure for gaining data. It also implies data generation involving activities that are intellectual, analytical and interpretive. The relational construction of knowledge between researchers and researched, and their intersubjective values, inform our understandings through their fundamental influence on our overall findings and subsequent claims (Limb and Dwyer, 2001).

Many qualitative researchers would suggest that the use of the term 'data generation', rather than 'data collection', is intended to encapsulate the much wider range of relationships between researcher, researched, social world and data which qualitative research spans (Peet and Watts, 1996). To speak of generating data, rather than collecting it, is more accurate, precisely because most qualitative perspectives would reject the idea that a researcher can be a completely neutral collector of pre-existing information about the social world. Instead, the researcher is seen as actively constructing knowledge about the world according to certain principles and using certain methods derived from their epistemological position.

### **3.1.1: Epistemological Considerations: Understanding everyday experience**

The purpose of this research is to investigate the nature of the relationship between people and public spaces in order to identify the mechanisms and practices through which specific models of urban 'public' space are (re)constructed through the design, regulation, management and use of contemporary cities. To begin to understand the intricate relationship(s) between people and public space(s), emphasis was placed upon in-depth qualitative research that sought to explicitly explore the complex nature of everyday lived public space (Amin and Thrift, 2002; Borden, 2001). This emphasis on everyday practices and relations required a methodological



approach capable of investigating meaningful space-based experiences and behaviour.

Put simply, I intended to get to the heart of how and why different members of the public perceive, conceive and live 'public spaces' in diverse - even sometimes contrasting or contradictory – ways (Lefebvre, 1991). The ontological underpinnings of this research stem from the belief that people's knowledge, views, understandings, experiences of, and interactions with, public spaces, are meaningful properties of the social and material world that this research is designed to explore. Public spaces are not merely static concrete entities, but spaces that are inflected with meaning and activated as 'public' through their design, management, regulation and *use*. An interactive qualitative research methodology was therefore essential to facilitate an unpacking of how public spaces were 'thought', 'lived' and 'created' by the participants incorporated into this research.

My epistemological position is that a legitimate way to generate the appropriate data to support this ontological position would be to interact with designers, regulators, managers and users of public space. By interacting with the multiple stakeholders, I could talk to them, listen to them, and gain access to their personal accounts and articulations. Through taking this approach, I could access their individual understandings, experiences of, and desires for, public space. However, my role as researcher was also to draw these personal accounts into conversation with one another in an attempt to generate a reflective understanding of the multiple socio-spatial relations (re)producing space as 'public'. I also observed how everyday public space was used to deepen my understanding of how it was 'lived' as well as 'thought' and 'spoken'. Only by synthesising the resultant findings could I begin to develop a conceptual framework through which public space in the contemporary city could be more accurately understood and accounted for. In sum, this thesis literally aims to 'bring to life' understandings of everyday public space, to account for its multiplicity and complexity, and to escape static conceptualisations of public space as a container for action.



This study does not look to represent the claims of the entire city of Newcastle or town of Gateshead, nor is it seeking to indicate that the responses and actions documented are representative of all diverse urban entities. Rather, the 'situated knowledge' (Cook and Crang, 2007) of the participants involved in the research project has been carefully investigated and analysed. This thesis examines 'intersubjective truths' (Cook and Crang, 1995) by exploring a range of subjective accounts that draw upon shared understandings concerning both of the sites under investigation and public space more generally. This is to argue that there is no single objective understanding or experience of public space waiting to be revealed, but rather that individuals and collectivities draw upon certain visions and discourses in their practice of everyday life, resulting in diverse, yet sometimes shared realities.

Comparing the 'meanings' that diverse users, managers, regulators and designers place upon the selected case study sites, and synthesising these findings with key themes presented in existing literatures, enables the development of new empirically-based insights into the 'everydayness' of public space. However, in order to develop a critical spatial framework for understanding public space, empirical insights alone are not enough: rather theoretical advancement through such synthesised observations is required. This will be more fully discussed below and in Chapter Five, as the theory used to attend to the perceived, conceived and lived dimensions of public space throughout the thesis is expounded through Lefebvre's conceptual triad. In the empirical chapters of the thesis, Lefebvre's conceptual triad is further developed and the inability to account meticulously for the excess of everyday public space articulated.

### **3.1.2: Research Design**

A research design is the logic that links the 'data to be collected' (and the conclusions to be drawn) to the 'initial questions of study' (Yin, 2003: 19). Careful design and rigour are crucial to the dependability of any research project. Poorly conceived research will undoubtedly result in poorly executed



research and in findings that do not stand up to scrutiny. Thoughtful planning and the use of procedures have been central throughout the overall process in an attempt to ensure the production of scrupulous research. I acknowledged that the research questions asked, the cases and participants involved, and the attempts to ensure rigour within the project, would directly affect the reliability of the findings and the subsequent claims made (as will be more fully demonstrated in the Chapter Eight of the thesis).

As highlighted by Flowerdew: 'A common failing is to see primary data collection as the starting point for a research project, and to conduct it without adequate background reading or planning' (1997: 109). In order to be effective, primary data generation needs to be part of an integrated process, which begins with the underlying research questions, is informed by previous work and is designed with specific plans in mind. To conduct worthwhile research, the key aims and objectives driving the project need to provide a sound and stable foundation for the overall agenda. Acknowledging the fundamental influence of the aims and objectives over the entire research project and its findings, Bryman's (1994) approach to their formulation was adopted, and specific aims and objectives developed - as outlined in Chapter One.<sup>44</sup> It is inevitable that research aims have a direct effect on research design. In contemplating the ways in which to conduct research, it is essential to consider what is required from the data generated. In fact, answering this question was fundamental in selecting the most suitable research methods.

### **3.2: Methodological Framework: Developing a multi-method qualitative research project**

As a central objective of this thesis is to develop a comprehensive understanding of the way in which models of public space are developed, a multi-method qualitative research framework was the most suitable. The use of multiple methods, or triangulation, reflects an attempt to secure an in-depth

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<sup>44</sup> This consisted of a list of several questions that were to be continually asked whilst creating the aims and objectives of the research project, for example: Am I clear about what the essence of my inquiry is?



understanding of the phenomenon under study, in this case public space. Triangulation is not a tool or strategy of validation, but an alternative to validation (Flick, 1998). The combination of multiple methodological practices, empirical materials, perspectives and observers in a single study is best understood then as a strategy that adds rigor, breadth, complexity, richness and depth to an enquiry (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). The focus is on validity claims through the quality of the selected individuals and case study sites, in relation to their relevance regarding the research aims and objectives (Cook and Crang, 1995) - what Graham refers to as 'warranted knowledge' (1997: 7). Each of the methods adopted in this research, in an attempt to produce 'warranted knowledge' of the case study sites, is now considered.

### **3.2.1: Secondary sources: Incorporating academic, policy and popular literature into qualitative research**

As part of this thesis research, I examined an array of literature, comprising published texts, journals, articles, leaflets, internet websites, policy guidance and documents, and special publications and magazines. I viewed each source critically, attempting to decipher not only what they explicitly stated, but also to reveal the more implicit understandings contained (and even hidden) within the copy. For example, the previous chapter discussed existing debates around the balance of reality and rhetoric within New Labour's urban policy. Secondary sources provided the background to the research and helped to highlight the main themes, issues and arguments in existing literature. Nevertheless, in order to develop a more comprehensive understanding of public space, it became clear that a substantial amount of primary research would be required (Lees, 2003b).

### **3.2.2: Case Study Approach**

In order to meet the aims and objectives of this project, a case study approach was adopted. As recommended by Yin: 'In general, case studies are the preferred strategy when...the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real life context'



(2003: 1). I inevitably had very little control over the events taking place within, through and across the two case study sites, and by using an empirical approach could ensure that a 'real life context' was being investigated. The distinctive need for a case study approach arises out of the desire to understand 'complex social phenomenon' (Yin, 2003: 2). As will be further discussed in the following two chapters, from background reading, it became apparent that public space is a 'complex social phenomenon' that needs to be understood theoretically, philosophically, ideationally and practicably (Borden, 2001).

Yin (2003: 13) provides a neat summary of the case study approach as an empirical enquiry that:

- 1 Investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when:
- 2 The boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident

In this, Yin highlights how researchers would use the case study method if they deliberately wanted to cover contextual conditions - believing that they might be pertinent to the phenomenon under study. As this thesis explicitly aims to spatialise public space, an examination and account of the contextual conditions of such spatiality was an essential part of the research strategy. If public space is to be considered as a socio-spatial formation, it is essential to examine the context within which such socio-spatial manifestations are created and played out. Having decided that a case study approach was the most suitable, the next decision was how many and which case studies to incorporate.

In the original project proposal for this thesis (written by Dr. Gordon MacLeod and Dr. Kurt Iveson - see Appendix 1), four nationwide case studies were set out, namely: Sheffield Winter Gardens; Dunston residential neighbourhood, Gateshead; London Kings Cross Station; and Williamson Park, Lancaster. Reviewing the initial research methodology, a panel representing The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister suggested that having four nationwide research sites would raise logistical difficulties and potentially weaken the quality of the



project. After initially changing the location of the four sites so that they were located in either Newcastle or Gateshead, namely: The BALTIC Contemporary Art Factory; The Centre for Life; Jesmond Dene Park; and Newcastle Central Station, only the first two sites were incorporated into the study.<sup>45</sup>

The decision to reduce the number of case study sites was partly because in a Graduate Discussion Paper Upgrade interview, held nine months into my first year, it was recommended that only two of the proposed case study sites be included in the empirical research. This was due to the logistical restrictions placed on the project, not least the duration of study. Valuing the opinions and extensive research experience of the senior members of staff, and following further reflection, I decided that the project would be strengthened by reducing the number of case study sites. Drawing on the work of Sayer (1994), a comprehensive and detailed 'intensive' approach was taken at two field sites, as opposed to a broader and less detailed 'extensive' approach at four. The intention was to create a more practical, manageable and realistic project, without compromising the potential quality of the research. Whether or not this has been achieved, can be examined in the detailed empirical chapters of the thesis, and through the subsequent illuminations and claims that can be made in relation to contemporary urban public space.

The key interests of this thesis meant that many cities throughout contemporary Britain could have been selected, however, various factors combined to make the case for Newcastle and Gateshead particularly attractive and convincing. Newcastle-Gateshead's then imminent (but now failed) bid to be Britain's representative for European City of Culture 2008 was based around a drive for cultural-regeneration to be adopted as a strategy for improving the 'surfaces, spaces and image of the city to attract potential investors and users' (NCC, 2003: 17).<sup>46</sup> Indeed, multi-million pounds of investment from private, public and

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<sup>45</sup> For a project of this scope, the overall quality of the research is enhanced through the benefits of basing the sites in one area. Such a research base allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the underlying processes (see Chapters Six and Seven), policies (see previous chapter) and programmes at work in the area.

<sup>46</sup> Gateshead has long been characterised as Newcastle's 'poorer cousin' (Howe, pers. comm., 2005), and considered to be an impediment to the development of the North East's profile due to the deeply ingrained and expansive socio-economic problems to be found there. However,



voluntary sectors over the past eight years has allegedly 'changed the face of Newcastle-Gateshead' (Chronicle, 22/11/2004). I anticipated that how the resultant new and revitalised developments were (re)designed, managed and regulated in relation to a particular vision of/for 'public space' would yield interesting and pertinent research. Equally, the functioning of public spaces represented a direct policy concern for Newcastle City Council, as indicated in the overall renewal and development strategy for the city: 'The Newcastle Plan aims...to get the public spaces of the city performing properly for all of its citizens' (NCC, 2002: 18). My existing research connections with major actors within the area, for example Newcastle and Gateshead Council, provided the seal on the selection area.

When considering the number of case study sites to incorporate into the research, I was aware of a general consensus, noted by Gomm et al. (2000), that when given the choice (and resources) multiple-case designs might be preferred over single-case designs. Yin (2003) supports this, proposing that even if it is only possible to do a two-case case study, the chances of doing a good case study will be better than using a single-case design. Single-case designs are vulnerable as they make researchers put 'all of their eggs in one basket'. Yin persuasively argues that, 'more importantly, the analytic benefits from having two cases may be substantial' (2003: 53). I followed this advice, believing in the benefits of having different case studies in raising fresh insights and improving the potential quality of the overall framework that I aimed to develop for understanding public space. That this approach was successful will hopefully be illustrated through the quality of the data generated through each of the individual research sites, and the subsequent claims that can be made (as documented in the individual empirical chapters and concluding chapter of the thesis).

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with their recent success in embracing the move towards cultural regeneration, Newcastle City Council and Gateshead Council have started to work together as 'more but not completely equal partners' (Usher, pers. comm., 2005). This is illustrated in the Newcastle-Gateshead Partnership, forged through their collaborative bid for City of Culture, and the Newcastle Gateshead Initiative, which was purposely set up to market the two areas as a comprehensive package (see Chapter Seven for a further explanation of the relationship between Newcastle and Gateshead as discussed empirically in relation to the BALTIC art factory).



I chose the final sites, BALTIC and LIFE, on both methodological and analytical grounds. Using Burgess’s (1984) five criteria (see Table 3.2.5) both sites provided the opportunity to carry out the research required. The sites were almost self-selected, explicitly advertising as ‘high quality public space’ in their respective promotional literature.<sup>47</sup> However and arguably more importantly, the sites displayed massive potential in the creation of interesting, engaging and relevant research (see the introductions of Chapters Six and Seven for further discussion). In sum, the major reasons for selecting these case studies, and for selecting the case study approach more generally, was due to their potential to generate theory creating and theory extension knowledge.

Table 3.2.5: Burgess’s site selection criteria	
1	Simplicity (selecting a site that offers the opportunity to move from simple to more complex situations and sub-sites);
2	Accessibility (selecting a site that permits access and entry);
3	Unobtrusiveness (selecting a site that permits the researcher to be low profile);
4	Permissible (selecting a site in which the research is permissible and the researcher has free entry);
5	Participation (selecting a site in which the researcher is able to participate in the ongoing activities).
(Burgess, 1984:123)	

For case studies, ‘theory development as part of the design phase is essential’, whether the ensuing case study’s purpose is to develop or test a theory (Yin, 2003: 28). This thesis aims to develop a framework for understanding the complexities of everyday urban public space, which would prove transportable across diverse terrains and contexts. One of the key debates within qualitative research takes place over whether or not case study research can be used in the creation of general understandings, i.e. in this case a general framework for understanding public space. Many argue that generalisability of the findings is possible with a case study, although attention needs to be given to the ground on which generalisations are made (Hammersley, 2000; Yin, 2003).

<sup>47</sup> I decided not to focus on Grainger town, which was perhaps the most obvious choice, because there is already a substantial amount of research carried out on that area e.g. by Chatterton (2002), Rogers (2006) etc. However, there is very little, if any, research carried out on the BALTIC and LIFE sites, so I was intending to yield new empirical material through my investigations.



I adopted Yin's approach to theoretical generalisability through the case study approach, believing that:

If under the varied circumstances (people, location, activities, owners, councils etc) you still can arrive at some common conclusions from both cases, they will have immeasurably expanded external generalisability of your findings, again compared to those from a single case alone.

(2003: 53)

By conducting original empirical research, this thesis aims to participate in the theoretical extension and refinement of public space, incorporating primary findings into the construction of a theoretical framework for understanding the contemporary urban realm.<sup>48</sup> In this regard, I acknowledge Fielding's conviction that: 'It is essential not to exaggerate the generalisability of findings obtained from one or two fields but this does not mean that generalisations from research are impossible' (1993: 169).

### **3.3: Everyday Ethnography**

The research conducted for this thesis took a primarily ethnographic approach to generating the data required from the case study sites. As stated by Brewer:

Ethnography is the study of people in naturally occurring settings or fields by means of methods which capture their social meanings and ordinary activities, involving the researcher participating directly in the setting, if not also the activities, in order to collect data in a systematic manner, but without meaning being imposed on them externally.

(2000: 10)

This thesis aims to interrogate the nature of public space in Newcastle-Gateshead, making it essential to go to the selected sites and discover what was actually taking place in those spaces. More specifically, I wanted to

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<sup>48</sup> In theoretical extension, one does not discover or develop new theory per se, but extends pre-existing theoretical or conceptual formulations to other groups or aggregations, to other bounded contexts or places, or to other sociocultural domains. In this sense, theoretical extension pre-eminently involves the 'transferability' of theory between at least two contexts (Lincoln and Guba, 1985: 124; Morrill et al., 2003). The basic idea is to explore the possibility of 'transferring concepts and theory' representing social forms or types across diverse contexts (Yin, 2003: 190). In this thesis, the framework will be finalised in Chapter Eight, as the material generated through both case study sites will be synthesised with the theoretical framework developed through engagement with existing models of public space (see Chapters Four and Five). Theoretical refinement refers to the modification of existing theoretical perspectives through extension or through the 'close inspection of a particular proposition with new case material' (Yin, 2003: 191).



discern if and how these spaces are (re)produced and (re)constructed as ‘public’. To investigate the everyday practices involved in the (re)production of the field sites, a study of the everyday life of those spaces was of paramount importance. The methods afforded by an ethnographic approach were therefore the most relevant, with its main features allowing for the kind of high-resolution investigation that the project required (see Table 3.3).

Table 3.3: Key features of the ethnographic approach	
According to Hammersley and Atkinson, ethnography is research with the following features:	
1	People’s behaviour is studied in everyday contexts rather than under unnatural or experimental circumstances created by the researcher;
2	Data are collected by various techniques but primarily by means of observation;
3	Data collection is flexible and unstructured to avoid pre-fixed arrangements that impose categories on what people say and do;
4	The focus is normally on single setting or group and is small scale;
5	The analysis of data involves attribution of the meanings of the human actions described and explained.
(1992: 104)	

Ethnography is an attempt to understand society by the generation of knowledge in a rigorous and systematic manner, or as Lofland and Lofland write, it ‘attempts to produce generic presuppositional answers to questions about social life and organization’ (1996: 30). There is a general conception that public space is a key arena of social life in the contemporary city and that the public/private dichotomy is a foundational way of structuring the city. In order to examine the influence of understandings of public space in structuring the everyday city, ethnography is essential. As Cook and Crang argue: ‘The basic purpose in using this approach is to understand parts of the world as they are experienced and understood in the everyday lives of people who actually ‘live them out’ (2007: 4).

In contemporary social thought, the notion that social structures and human agency are interpenetrated and mutually determined is now a commonplace (Giddens, 1984; Thrift, 1983). Structures provide human agents with a limited horizon of capabilities and possibilities, but those structures only exist in



everyday practices. One must confront the structure-agency debate 'not at an ontological level but at the level of practice' (Smith, 1984: 364). A theoretically informed, structurally sensitive ethnography can uncover how structures such as the divisions between public and private are made real in the contexts and commotions of daily life. The virtue of ethnography is that it enables 'the study of instantiation of structures in particular social practices' (Jackson, 1985: 166; Crang, 2002; Herbert, 2000; Lees, 2004).

Ethnography can be a combination of several methods of data generation. It is distinguished by its overall objectives which are to 'understand the social meanings and activities of people in a given 'field' or 'setting'', and its general approach, 'which involves close association with, and often participation in, this setting' (Brewer, 2000: 11). The use of ethnography for this thesis research was a straightforward choice to make as it directly linked to my epistemological and ontological beliefs, and would generate the data necessary to answer the research questions. Ethnography is premised on the view that the central aim of the social sciences is to understand people's actions and their experiences of the world, and the ways in which their motivated actions arise and reflect back on these experiences. Brewer (2000) and Kusenbach (2003), amongst others, argue that once this is the central aim, knowledge of the social world is acquired from intimate familiarity with day-to-day practice and the meanings of social action. It is through understanding this 'day-to-day' practice and the 'meanings' of people's everyday actions that the way in which notions of 'public' and its spatiality are inscribed and articulated will be unveiled.

As argued by Crang: 'Ethnography is one of the approaches in qualitative work that can address the non-discursive and study what people do as well as what they say' (2002: 650). Through the investigation of everyday practices, ethnography enables analyses of the important moments when macro (e.g. government policy) and micro (e.g. people's movement) interpenetrate, when constraints and contingencies alternately pattern and perturb daily life. It can reveal not only how people perceive, conceive and use space, but also how these three dimensions interpenetrate with one another, affecting how everyday



public space is produced. Such research is of undoubted significance to geographers interested in how landscapes are constructed and lived, the processes by which structures are made real in 'the everyday movements and contexts of human actions' (Herbert, 2000: 555). This clearly has significance for beginning to understand how the public/private dichotomy is enacted within the everyday contemporary urban realm.

In order to understand the ethnographic approach used, it is important to consider the individual methods incorporated into the empirical work conducted January 2005 - January 2006. Ethnographic methods can roughly be divided into interviewing informants and observing 'naturally' occurring social settings, conduct and events (Kusenbach, 2003: 458). Therefore, these two methods were adopted and will now be considered in turn.

### 3.3.1: Participant Observation<sup>49</sup>

Participant observation offers the social researcher a distinct way of generating data. It does not rely on what people say they do, or what they say they think. It is more direct than that. Observation is based on the premise that for certain purposes it is best to observe what actually happens. Indeed, Lefebvre's (1996) method of rhythmanalysis suggests that in order to understand the processes and flows (re)producing urban space, one must find a vantage point where an overview can be gained. Lefebvre's suggestion is reminiscent of De Certeau's (1986) view from above (where he actually uses the twin towers of New York as an example), when he talks about the need to detach oneself from their environment to be able to really understand what is going on within it. However, and more importantly, Lefebvre builds on this position of researcher

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<sup>49</sup> When considering using this method it is vital to understand the key tension suggested in its oxymoronic title. To be a *participant in* a 'culture' implies an immersion of the researcher's self into the everyday rhythms and routines of the community, a development of relationships with people who can show and tell the researcher what is 'going on' there and, through this, an experience of a whole range of relationships and emotional states that such a process must inevitably involve (Hunt, 1989). Conversely, to be an *observer of* a 'culture' implies a detached sitting-back and watching of activities which unfold in front of the researcher as if s/he was not there, a simple recording of these goings-on in field notes, tallies, drawings, photographs and other forms of material evidence and, through this, a striving to maintain some form of dispassionate, 'scientific' objectivity (Cook and Crang, 1995: 21; Fyfe, 1992).



as overseer, stating that:

To analyse a rhythm, you have to be out of it. Exteriority is necessary. And yet to grasp a rhythm you must yourself have been grabbed by it, have given yourself inwardly to the time [and I would argue space] that it rhythmmed. (1996: 229)

I attempted to recreate this stance when carrying out the empirical endeavours of this thesis, as Lefebvre's insights concerning urban space generally are particularly relevant to public space research (see Chapter Five).

I conducted participant observation at both sites January 2005–January 2006. I was present at each of the sites at least twice at every part (morning 7am–12am, afternoon 12pm–6pm and night 6pm–12am) of each day of the week. I also carried out participant observation across all four seasons, and during every advertised major event held at each of the sites e.g. the Shindig Outdoor Birthday Party, BALTIC outdoor festival and World Cup screenings in Times Square. This enabled me to experience the different 'temporal rhythms' (Lefebvre, 1996) of the areas as they changed throughout the day and across the year. The total amount of time spent in the field amounted to over 150 hours at each site, which facilitated an 'intensive' (Sayer, 1992) engagement with each of the case studies. Whilst carrying out the observations I would move so that I could gain a vantage point of the different areas that constituted the case study locations. In the case of BALTIC, I would move between the internal floors of the art gallery, and across different parts of BALTIC Square in order to survey the internal and external spaces constituting that case study site. In the case of the Pink Triangle, I would move around different bars and clubs, as well as locate in different areas throughout Times Square. My reasons for this approach were that I would be able to gain an insight into the ways in which people interacted in and across different parts of the sites (see Chapter Six and Seven).

I followed the guidance of Cook and Crang (2007) when taking notes in the field. There were six elements to my note taking:

- 1) Locating the ethnographic setting e.g. the location, background and character of the setting;
- 2) Describing the physical space e.g. the main physical characteristics or



- any changes in the physical setting;
- 3) Describing others' interactions with the setting e.g. who the people and other 'actors' in the setting were, how the individuals were interacting with the space and other users, and what were the people I observed were doing and talking about;
- 4) Describing my participation in interacting with the setting e.g. where did I locate and how I got involved in the setting;
- 5) Reflections on the research process e.g. first impressions of the setting and how (or if) they changed, and to what extent my observations were aiding the research process; and,
- 6) Self-reflections e.g. how I felt in conducting the participant observation.

By following this guidance, I generated a comprehensive set of field notes that enabled me to develop key insights into both case study areas.

Depending on whether I was 'grabbed' by the activities taking place in the field site, i.e. when I was being a participant; or I was 'out of' the activities, i.e. I was an observer, the amount of notes taken varied. However, I always spent at least one-hour writing notes for every day I spent in the field (see Chapters Six and Seven for excerpts). I used the material generated from participant observations alongside other primary and secondary sources to support the in-depth nature of my analysis. By observing and participating in the case study sites, it was possible to begin to understand the dynamic processes and practices at work in, through, and across each space, (re)creating it as 'public' (or not).

As warned by Brewer (2000), when carrying out participant observation it is essential to maintain a balance between 'insider' and 'outsider' status; to identify with the people under study and get closer to them whilst maintaining a professional distance which permits adequate observation and data generation. I was in familiar settings, but in a slightly different role i.e. that of researcher. When carrying out participant observation, I aimed for the 'ideal stance' of an 'intelligent, sympathetic and non-judgemental' researcher (Cassell, 1988: 95). Without delving too deeply into the psychology of perception, however, I accept that as a human being I did not simply observe the overall view of the sites or record the events I witnessed in a transparent, uncomplicated, mechanical and



straightforward fashion.<sup>50</sup>

Recordings in field diaries will always be partial because they are personalised views, vignettes whose representativeness is unsure. Similarly, the scope of my observations was constrained by the physical limits of my role and location. As has been commonly noted, lone observers are particularly susceptible to focusing on the abnormal, aberrant and exceptional. Wittgenstein warns that: 'The aspects of things that are most important for us are hidden because of their simplicity and familiarity' (1968: 129; see also Lefebvre on Hegel, 2002). However, when writing my field diary, I attempted to focus on the holistic everyday nature of the space, by accounting for the ordinary, and the banal, as well as the different and exciting. By taking an opportunistic approach to participant observation, I engaged in a number of informal and spontaneous conversations, which were often used to add texture to the research, and even raised issues that were further explored in the research (see the discussion of the acceptability of public nudity in art in Chapter Seven). Such encounters also led to identifying potential interviewees from multiple stakeholders.

### **3.3.2: Interviews: Power relations, preparation and execution**

In qualitative research, the sample is not intended to be representative since 'the emphasis is usually upon an analysis of meanings in a specific context' (Robinson, 1998: 12). Commenting upon theoretical sampling, Cook and Crang argue that it is not the sheer number, 'typicality' or 'representativeness' of people approached which matters, but the *quality* and *positionality* of the information they can offer (1995: 11). Some have argued that such selection may seem 'disconcertingly imprecise' (Flowerdew, 1997: 7), but Patton's refreshingly simple justifications legitimate the sample of informants used in this thesis: 'There are no rules for sample size in qualitative inquiry. Sample size depends on what is at stake, what will be useful, what will have credibility and what can be done with the available time and resources' (1990: 132).

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<sup>50</sup> Evidence in relation to memory and perception indicates that the mind acts as an intermediary between the 'world out there' and the way the individual experiences it. There is almost inevitably an element of interpretation involved. To observe cannot necessarily be equated with to understand, as it is impossible to see the whole picture, and things are not always what they appear to be.



The validity, meaningfulness and insights of empirical investigations have more to do with information richness and the observational or analytical capacities of the researcher than with sample size. Following the 'intensive' approach (Sayer, 1994), I aimed to develop a sample of people whose main concerns and actions over the research period could help to build a better understanding of the 'lived' dimension of the case studies. This was then linked to the design and practical management of the public spaces on the ground level and any subsequent effects they had on the lived experience of the sites. The use of the snowballing strategy, whereby the interviewees that I first contacted suggested other relevant people to contact, meant that most of the people interviewed as part of the research were directly relevant to the aims of the investigation. In short, the interviewees were stakeholders of some sort within BALTIC or LIFE, be they (non)users, regulators, managers or designers of the space. Throughout the research, over 40 people across these groups were included in the project (see Appendix 2 for details of all interviewees).

The methods of maintaining and generating conversations with people on a specific topic or range of topics, and the interpretation which social researchers make of the resultant data, constitute the fundamentals of interviews and interviewing.<sup>51</sup> Burgess describes interviews as 'conversations with a purpose' (1984: 102). The interview produces 'situated understandings' grounded in specific interactional episodes: therefore interviews can yield rich insights into people's experiences, aspirations, attitudes and feelings (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003: 48). In order to achieve this, however, researchers must appreciate the dynamics of interviewing, sharpen the use of the method and understand the different methods of conducting interviews and analysing data, whilst illustrating an awareness of their strengths and weaknesses as research methods.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Much attention has been focused recently on the interview process and the need for reflexive consideration of how knowledge is produced through social relations of the interview: a key element of the postmodern and cultural turns (see Baxter and Eyles, 1997).

<sup>52</sup> Interviews are used as a resource for understanding how individuals make sense of their social world and act within it. However, ethno-methodological approaches are interested in interviews as a topic in their own right. This approach assumes that the link between a person's account of an action and the action itself cannot be made. Instead, an interview is a social encounter like any other. The prescriptions of accounts to control the situation are seen as merely attempts to produce a false social situation, which has no validity beyond the interview; they cannot be assumed to produce data, which reflect a world beyond interpretation. For this



I used semi-structured interviews for this thesis. They allowed participants to answer questions more on their own terms than the standardised interview would have permitted, but still provided greater structure for comparability over that of the focused interview. I was prepared to be flexible in terms of the order in which the topics were considered, and more significantly, to let the interviewee develop ideas and speak more widely on the issues being raised.<sup>53</sup> This meant that the answers were open-ended, and there was more emphasis on the interviewee elaborating points of interest. Equally, it allowed interviewees to raise issues that I had not anticipated. To use an example: when carrying out research in LIFE, some of the users commented on using that area to develop and engage in sexual practice on site, something which not only made me blush but also genuinely surprised me. I embraced such incidents as positive outcomes that caused me to reflect on the overall research process and its potential findings.

Every interview and research issue demands its own preparation and practice. I, therefore, formulated and used an individual research guide for each interview. The guides consisted of a list of the general issues I wanted to cover and a simple list of key words and concepts, which served as a reminder of the central discussion topics (for an example see Appendix 3). As recommended by Babbie: 'The topics initially listed in a guide are often drawn from the existing literature on an issue, the identification of key concepts and the isolation of themes is a preliminary part of the process' (1992: 23).

One of the advantages of the interview guide was its flexibility. I always tried to allow the interview to flow in as natural a direction as possible, but often found myself having to re-direct the discussion to cover issues that were still outstanding whenever the conversation started to veer too far away from the research issues. I also inevitably found myself constructing questions *in situ*,

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reason, interviews are often regarded as a topic of social research, not just a source for social research.

<sup>53</sup> This is something which may have been lost if group interviews had been used as a research method. Whereas it may have been interesting to look at how people's experiences directly related to each other, it was logistically impossible to carry out focus groups and at least the 'group think' phenomenon was avoided (Martin and Flowerdew, 1997).



drawing on themes that had already been broached and from the general tone of the interview. This obviously required good communication skills and a certain degree of confidence, things that I developed through practice as the project advanced. One of the things which I initially registered was that any loss of concentration could lead to the inarticulate or ambiguous wording of questions, as illustrated when one interviewee responded to a question with 'Sorry I don't know exactly what you're asking' (Dave, pers. comm., 2005).<sup>54</sup>

It is important to consider carefully the order of the questions or topics in an interview guide. Minichiello et al. (1995) suggest that the most important consideration in question order is preserving the rapport between the researcher and the interviewee. This requires that discomfort for the informant be minimised. The general advice I adhered to was to follow a question ordering which was a hybrid of funnel and pyramid structures (Minichiello et al., 1995).<sup>55</sup> The interviews always started with simple non-threatening questions, then moved to the more abstract and reflective aspects before progressing towards sensitive issues. For example, when interviewing people about the BALTIC, I started with simple questions such as how often interviewees visited, and then moved onto whether the respondent believed they could engage with the exhibitions. This sort of structure was successful in offering the benefits of both funnel and pyramid ordering, allowing a healthy rapport to be established with the interviewees.

The context of the interviews was deemed significant to the research process and a range of locations was used (see Appendix 2). I conducted the

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<sup>54</sup> The primary purpose of the interview guide was to jog my memory in interviews in order to ensure that I covered all of the issues as thoroughly as possible. One also found it useful, where possible, to provide interviewees with a copy of the issues to be raised before the interview in the hope of prompting thought on the matters to be discussed.

<sup>55</sup> Funnelling involves an initial focus on general issues, followed by a gradual movement towards personal matters and issues specific to the informant. As an ordering strategy funnelling draws on long held advice in interviewing to keep sensitive issues until the end. The advantage of this strategy is that the interview begins in a relaxed and non-threatening manner. Rapport between the interviewer and the informant can develop and the chance that the informant will discontinue the interview is reduced. In the pyramid interviewing strategy, abstract and general questions are asked at the end. The interview starts with easy to answer questions about the informant's involvement in the issue. This allows the informant to become accustomed to the interview, interviewer and topics before they are asked questions that require deeper reflection (Martin and Flowerdew, 1997).



interviews in places accessible and familiar to the interviewee in question. Such familiarity in location is justified by Shurmer-Smith, who claims that: 'Such venues give further insight into the researched, and also affect what they are willing to discuss or how to respond to questions' (2002: 137). The chosen locations were intended to make the interviewee feel comfortable; by being in a familiar setting interviewees could be contemplative about the topics they wished to discuss. To maintain the quality of the interview, ensure maximum concentration of the informants and allow enough time for transcription, none of the interviews exceeded two-hours.<sup>56</sup>

The method used to record an interview influences the overall output. I digitally recorded all of the interviews for this thesis after receiving the permission of the informants (except in one case where permission was refused). By digitally recording the interviews a more natural conversational interview style could follow as I was not preoccupied with taking notes, being better positioned to be a more attentive and critical listener. Nevertheless, as noted by Douglas: '...a recorder may sometimes inhibit an informant's response because the recorder serves as a reminder of the formal situation of the interview' (1985: 12). To minimise the impact on the interview, I always placed the recorder in an inconspicuous place whilst attempting not to compromise the quality of the recording. Unfortunately, a consequence was that the recording quality was sometimes poor. In such instances, the brief notes, which I made as back-up in case of a technical fault, were very helpful in filling in any inaudible sections of recording.

According to Bryman (1999), when interviewing someone nervousness might mean that energies are devoted to keeping the flow of conversation going and

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<sup>56</sup> I adhered to strict guidelines when transcribing. As advised by Shurmer-Smith (2002), I placed comments that related to the practice of the interview, such as the wording of the question and missed opportunities to prompt, in the left hand margin. I elaborated upon these annotations and other issues concerned with contact, access, ethics and overall method, in a personal field diary. I used the right hand margin of the transcript file for annotations on the substantive issues of the research project. I elaborated upon these comments, which generally used the terminology of social science, in an analytical log. The analytical log was an exploration and speculation about what the interview found in relation to the research questions. It referred to the links between the data gathered in each interview and the established literature and theory.



less to noting how the interviewer and interviewee are interacting with each other. This was noticeable in the earlier interviews, but as my interviewing skills developed through practice it became much less of an issue. I began to notice that whilst listening to the informants I would observe them, and their behaviour would directly influence my personal performance during the interaction (for example, when an interviewee was nervous I would reassure them that what they were saying was helpful). Similarly, I would notice how informants would observe me and do the same. According to Crossley, this is an inevitable double hermeneutic produced by the interview situation, it: ‘...is what creates intersubjectivity, a sensuously relational experience whereby people consciously and unconsciously construct their own meaning, objectifying ‘others’, recognise themselves in them and play on their performances accordingly to engage as best they can’ (1999: 19). This kind of double hermeneutic was greatly influenced by the nature of the rapport maintaining the interview and the power relations playing out in it.<sup>57</sup>

Martin and Flowerdew (1997) believe that rapport with people is a matter of understanding their model of the world and communicating your understanding of the world symmetrically. In order to develop a good rapport with the interviewees, I attempted to follow Minichiello’s advice that: ‘This can be done effectively by matching the perceptual language, the images of the world...of the informant’ (1995: 340). Achieving and maintaining rapport, or a productive interpersonal climate, can be critical to the success of an interview. Interviews in which both the interviewer and the informant feel at ease usually generate ‘...more insightful and more valid data than otherwise might be the case’ (Flowerdew, 1997: 23). After conducting several interviews, I found my confidence growing and the interviews seemed to get better as my research skills improved. This can be clearly discerned from later interview transcripts where the number of ‘missed opportunities’ to follow-up key points reduced significantly.

Interviews are, like any other social encounter, loaded with power relationships.

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<sup>57</sup> Whilst this thesis does not aim to give a comprehensive account of ‘hermeneutics’ or critical theory more broadly, for an overview see Thompson’s (1981) *Critical Hermeneutics*.



According to Silverman: 'Power relationships are not fixed or unidirectional, but shift and change according to how the researcher and the researched are interacting with one another' (2001: 47). Structural inequalities and personal differences based on class, status, age, race and sexual orientation all affect the research situation, and are played out in different ways both consciously and less consciously.<sup>58</sup>

Throughout the interviews, I attempted to be attentive to the potential influence of my identity, using different facets of my experience to engage with each of the informants in the best possible way. For example, this meant that I would try to convey the questions that I was asking in as articulate way as possible, engaging in the discourses relevant to the particular interviewee (for example, I would not ask members of the general public explicitly about Lefebvre's conceptual triad). However, as observed by England (1994) (and as will be further discussed below), such reflexivity can make us more aware of, and responsive to, asymmetrical power relationships, but it cannot remove them. The myth that ethnographers are people without a personal identity, historical location or personality and that they would all produce the same findings in the same setting, 'is the mistake of naïve realism' (Brewer, 2000: 99). It is more effective to account for the power relationships within an interview situation rather than ignore them.

### **3.4 Analysis, interpretation and presentation**

'Analysis' can be defined as the process of bringing order to the data, organising what is there into patterns, categories and descriptive units, and looking for relationships between them; 'interpretation' involves attaching meaning and significance to the analysis, explaining the patterns, categories and relationships; while 'presentation' constitutes the act of writing up the data in textual form.  
(Brewer, 2000: 104)

Conducting qualitative research inevitably involves elements of analysis,

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<sup>58</sup> I inevitably brought my own histories, locations and identifications to the research, which has no doubt influenced the interpretations I have made. These were continually undergoing the process of critical reflection and despite being reluctant to indulge in self-interest, when interviewing participants, questions of who 'they' are informed who 'I' was. The power relations of research meant that I could not escape my own positioning vis-à-vis the interviewees (see Chapter Six).



interpretation and presentation. In moving away from the structured interviewing format or generalised questionnaires, it becomes necessary to employ techniques that can make some analytic sense of the 'raw' data.<sup>59</sup> Conventional methods of achieving this involve the coding of open-ended replies in order to permit comparison and synthesis. Strauss defines coding as:

The general term for conceptualising data; thus, coding includes raising questions and giving provisional answers (hypotheses) about categories and about their relations. A code is a term for any produce of the analysis (whether a category or a relation among two or more categories).<sup>60</sup> (1988: 20-1)

Inevitably, the aims and interests of the thesis directly influenced how I started to categorise the raw data. However, these categories were always open to modification and challenge by the interview data generated. For example, I was interested in how users perceived the sites that I was studying. I then focussed upon the primary data in order to create an understanding of how the users of the sites felt about that space to see if there were any similarities. When several of the interviewees discussed a particular theme, they were categorised under topics and headings such as 'accessibility', which allowed me to index the data accordingly.

Researchers analyse the data they generate to seek meaning from it. I constructed themes, relations between variables and patterns in the data, through content analysis. As advised by Babbie (1992), I based the analysis on latent as opposed to manifest content.<sup>61</sup> This determination of meanings within the text is a form of coding. The codes created are not classed as ends in

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<sup>59</sup> Questionnaires are usually standardised, they are rarely tailored to individual circumstances. The aim of the questionnaire is often to survey a representative sample of the population so that you can make generalisations from the responses. However, a generalised response was not the aim of this research project, and in most cases, the explanatory power of questionnaires is limited.

<sup>60</sup> Classification into categories is a conceptual process and is clearly part of the process of interpretation by which 'meaning is brought to the data by the analyst' (Dey, 1993: 44-5). To classify is to break down the data into bits that relate together as classes that compromise concepts.

<sup>61</sup> Latent content analysis involves searching the documents for themes. This requires determination of the underlying meaning of what is said, e.g. 'I don't really feel like I fit in' would be related to the theme of accessibility even if the word were not explicitly stated. Manifest content analysis assesses the visible, surface content of documents such as an interview transcript. Searching interview data for manifest content involves the tallying of words such as 'accessible'.



themselves: rather they provided a means of conceptually organising the wealth of material. Neither are they an explanatory framework in themselves. I used 'emic' and 'etic' codes to make sense of the material. 'Emic' codes are those used by the informants themselves, while 'etic' codes are those I assigned to the data to describe events and attribute meanings and theories.<sup>62</sup> The synthesis of both techniques of coding helped to determine the findings.

Stories told in the research encounter are not simply a 'means of mirroring the world', but the means *through which* it is constructed, understood and acted upon (Cook and Crang, 1995: 11). Ideally, this thesis aims to portray the complexities, nuances, contradictions and heterogeneity of the informants' ideas and experiences. It is particularly concerned with avoiding what Strauss (1998) identifies as 'metonymic freezing' - an imprisoning process of representational essentialising whereby parts of the lives of 'others' come to epitomise the whole. There is a continual tension between theoretical generalisation and the multitude of differences experienced in practice. In essence, when producing themes through coding, the heterogeneity of experiences is often lost. The overall conclusion of the thesis discusses this, as the importance of accounting for the alternative experiences of different people in public space is more thoroughly considered.

Throughout this research, informants normally recounted their actions in an explanatory context. In other words, they qualified the description of their action in public space with reasons why they behaved as they did, generally without any prompting. The analysis of the interviews focused not only on motivations and reasons, but also on social identities and how they were reconstructed within the social setting in which they operated (see Chapters Six and Seven). All experience is processed through practice, discourse and interpretation since people do not have pure experiences (interviewer nor informant). Therefore, representations, including the accounts in this thesis, are always interpretations. Experience is at once always already an interpretation (the accounts of the

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<sup>62</sup> According to Martin and Flowerdew (1997), this reveals the need to think clearly about your epistemology (i.e. how you can claim to know something) since informants do not discuss issues in terms of 'etic' categories (see above for discussion of epistemology).



interviewees) and is in need of an interpretation (my own account) (Scott, 1992). Experiences are always in the process of interpretation (even when the researcher engages in critical reflexivity – as will be discussed below), as are the interpretative frameworks which are brought to bear upon them, which enable classificatory systems to be built around them. The classificatory systems I adopted to analyse the responses of the interviewees in this research are, therefore, inevitably interpretations, but this does not imply that they have no meaning beyond those interpretations themselves.

One cannot study the lived experience directly, because language, speech and systems discourse mediate and define the very experience we attempt to describe. As argued by Denzin and Lincoln: ‘we study the representation of experience not experience itself’ (2003: 51). The informants’ accounts were just as partial as my own selections. This translates into a situation whereby the interviewees’ accounts of their perceptions and uses of public space are representations that then go on to be interpreted by myself, which in turn are interpreted by the reader of this thesis. Whilst the possibility of the interviewees misrepresenting themselves, of me misrepresenting or misinterpreting the interviewees, and the reader misinterpreting what is contained within the thesis are obvious, this is unfortunately a risk that affects all social research. By highlighting the procedures adopted in an attempt to reduce such confusions, I hope that it is clear that there was a sustained attempt to produce rigorous and valid research.

Following Hammersley: ‘no knowledge is certain, but knowledge claims can be judged reasonably accurately in terms of their likely truth’ (1990: 60). Brewer (2000) provides five widely accepted guiding principles within qualitative research, which can be adopted to ensure that interpretations are as plausible and accurate as possible (see Table 3.4).



**Table 3.4: Brewer's five guiding principles to ethnography**

This requires ethnographers to do five things:

- 1 Check their interpretations with members to ensure people in the field find them truthful;
- 2 In developing this interpretation, ethnographers nonetheless adopt a critical attitude towards what members say (since people may deliberately try to deceive);
- 3 Look for and seek alternative explanations, even if only to dismiss them, since this shows how deeply the material has been thought about;
- 4 Keep methods and data in context, since interpretations are tied to the methods used;
- 5 Represent the polyphony of voices in the field (since there will be many versions of truth among members, even if the ethnographer has developed their own).

(Brewer, 2000: 124)

Whilst there were multiple subjectivities incorporated into the research (the informants' and my own), I made the decisions about what should be included in the thesis. I made interpretations and selections from the informants and from my own experience within the research context, which best illustrated my research inquiry, namely the production of public space. Equally, in the process of representing the informants' articulations and experiences, encountered as they were lived, I reduced them to written utterance by default. Representation involved the translation into the literal, meaning that the multitude of expressions, nuances, feelings and embodiment in the research was often lost because they could not be represented. Nevertheless, they informed the understandings generated through the research rendering partiality and incompleteness inevitable.

### **3.4.1: Conducting policy-relevant research**

The question of whether or not geographical research ought to be policy relevant, or at least socially useful, is one that appears to have returned to haunt the discipline time again (Berry, 1994; Graf, 1998; Harvey, 1989).<sup>63</sup> At the turn of the century, this dispute intensified as many academics began a timely reflection of their personal research agendas, those of their discipline, the

<sup>63</sup> For an effective overview of what is meant by policy relevance see Staeheli and Mitchell (2005), where they argue that the issue of what makes research relevant cannot be separated from the questions of why research should be relevant, how research becomes relevant, the goals of research, and for whom it is intended to be relevant.



state of contemporary circumstances more generally, and, the possibility of the improvement of the latter through changes to the former. This debate is best illustrated throughout the pages of *Area* (1971-75), *Progress in Human Geography* (2000–2004) and *Transactions of the Institute for British Geographers* (2000–2002), where the significance, importance and obligation of policy relevant research for geographers were hotly debated. Ron Martin made one of the boldest statements, claiming: ‘As a social science, and moreover, as a supposedly *critical* social science, I believe that human geography has a moral obligation to engage with public policy issues and debate...to apply our ideas for the betterment of society’ (2001: 189, emphasis in original). Martin’s simple but bold argument was reflective of the sentiment of many geographers (Imrie and Raco, 2003; Holden and Iveson, 2003; Lees, 2003a).

Jamie Peck (1999) advanced the debate by highlighting some of the key challenges facing policy-relevant researchers. Using the characterisation of ‘grey geography’ to describe the status of policy relevant research, Peck highlighted how it is often considered a ‘less academic and uncritical’ pursuit or ‘intellectually inferior’, subsequently ‘discouraging academics to get their hands dirty’ (1999: 131-135). Instead, he argued that: ‘Policy research is a legitimate, non-trivial and potentially creative aspect of the work of academic geographers, but one that we are currently neglecting and/or undervaluing’ (Peck, 1999: 131). Drawing on the work of Harrison (1976), Peck contended that it is essential for academic geographers to carry out policy research and that this research needs to be ‘better and deeper’ (1999: 131). As highlighted in the previous chapter, in relation to New Labour’s visions of public space, policy relevant research must aim for analysis that questions the parameters, presumptions and premises of policies rather than simply their outcomes.

Being part of the ODPM/ESRC Sustainable Communities research program, this thesis aims to produce policy relevant research.<sup>64</sup> As demonstrated in the previous chapter, I therefore carried out a thorough review of recent urban policy in Britain to understand the main issues and concerns surrounding public

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<sup>64</sup> Debates over relevance are at a critical point, as funding agencies such as ESRC increasingly want to see the societal merit or benefit of research (Staeheli and Mitchell, 2005).



space. Due to the increasing prominence of public space on the national policy agenda (e.g. CABE, 2003), my ambition to create policy relevant research is probably of very little surprise. As Davies notes: 'Researchers are much more likely to have some input into policy formation when they do research directed towards policy issues and sponsored by organisations involved in making and implementing social policy' (Davies, 1999: 368). However, despite the obvious relation of this thesis to the national policy agenda, and my responsibility to ODPM (now DCLG), the aim to conduct policy relevant research posed some fundamental challenges.

The (static) visions of public space offered in urban policy do not always resonate with the accounts of the (lived) public space as revealed through the empirical endeavours of this thesis. Subsequently, some of the suggestions that I will be making to DCLG discuss public space in a very different language to urban policy. This is something which is not entirely unusual since working in academic environments, academic researchers tend to adopt a critical and challenging attitude to what Finch calls 'the official view', producing findings which are not 'wholeheartedly adopted by officialdom' (1986: 224).<sup>65</sup> Theoretically, this is something that I found advantageous as it provided a stimulus to finding alternative ways of conceptualising public space.

Research is not born relevant but made relevant by the people involved in its formulation and execution (Staeheli and Mitchell, 2005). I found resonance with Bulmer's notion of the 'enlightenment model' (1982) of policy relevant research: in this case, researchers keep one step removed from policy makers in order to retain their critical and independent gaze, while remaining committed to being relevant in policy terms. Researchers offer 'enlightening' and alternative formulations of problems, offer new perspectives on past policies, problems and solutions, and engage in research designed to impact policy in a 'general and indirect manner rather than specifically' (Hammersley, 1992: 131-2). This is

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<sup>65</sup> Using data that capture personal experiences, the differences between the perspectives of ordinary people and officialdom can be explored. The ethnographer's critical gaze on social life, his or her closeness to the people studied, the wish to get behind the façade and to critique official positions and claims, all ensure that academic ethnography is challenging and confrontational.



precisely the stance that I attempted to emulate when conducting this research, not least because policy relevant research does not necessarily translate easily into policy outcomes (Banks and MacKian, 2000).

There is widespread literature commenting on what Ian Diamond (Director of ESRC) called the 'non unilateral relationship between academic and research and policy development' (pers. comm., 2004; Imrie, 2001; Peck, 2000; Staeheli, 2004). As highlighted by Rist: 'In reviewing the assessment of the contributions of qualitative work to the policy process, it is apparent that the contributions are more in the realm of potential than the actual' (2002: 641). Nevertheless, rather than dooming my research to the governmental dustbin, it is perhaps more fruitful to comment upon how I attempted to improve the chances of my research being acknowledged by the policy community. I followed Hammersley and Atkinson's (1992) advice that at the very least researchers must be prepared to interact with policy makers and make their findings accessible to them by presenting them in a format and language they can understand. In the formative meetings with my former ODPM supervisor and current DCGL supervisor, they requested that I produce a 'non-specialist' Executive Summary of my research findings. In response, I have produced a 1,000-word summary of the main points of my thesis for the urban research team at the DCLG (see website [www.dclg.gov.uk](http://www.dclg.gov.uk)). Ultimately, its success in influencing policy is beyond my control, but through fulfilling the request of the DCLG I hope that it will be carefully considered.

### **3.5: Reflexivity, Positionality and Ethics**

In recent years, qualitative researchers have been at the forefront of discussions about the inherent and fundamental role of the researcher in the production of social scientific research, and hence of any subsequent claims to knowledge (England, 1994; Hay, 2000; Rose, 1997, 2000). To account for the impact of the researcher (and the 'double hermeneutic' as discussed earlier between the researcher and informants) on research findings, qualitative researchers are calling for the importance of critical reflexivity. Reflexivity, as defined by England (1994), is a process of constant, self-conscious, scrutiny of



the self as researcher and of the research process. Reflexivity involves reflection by ethnographers on the social processes that impinge upon and influence data. It requires a critical attitude towards data and recognition of the influence of factors such as the location of setting, the sensitivity of the topic, the power relations in the field and the nature of the social interaction between the researcher and the researched. As argued by Brewer, all of these factors influence how the data are 'interpreted and conveyed in writing up results' (2000: 127). In sum, Rose (2000) argues that reflexivity should be a strategy for marking knowledge as situated and always partial.

In contrast to the 'god-trick' of claiming to see the whole world while remaining distanced from it, subjugated and critical knowledge work from their situatedness to produce partial perspectives on the world (Rose, 2000).<sup>66</sup> As argued by Weston:

No longer is it generally acceptable for (ethnographic researchers) to conceal or deny the significance of their gender identity, age, class, or ethnicity. Instead, contemporary ethnographic writing tends to acknowledge these attributes as factors that shape an (ethnographer's) interpretation of what he or she observed in the field. (1996: 276)

Reflexivity was required in the research encounters incorporated into this research to address power relations, and I continually reflected upon my positionality when carrying out the research. As recommended by McDowell (1996), I aimed for 'full contextual knowledge' i.e. a comprehensive understanding of the researcher, the researched and the research context.

The search for transparent reflexivity is bound to fail. As argued by Latham and McCormack (2004), we cannot know everything, nor can we survey power as if we can fully understand, control or redistribute it. What we may be able to do is something rather more modest but, perhaps, more radical: to inscribe into our research practices some absences and fallibilities while recognising that the significance of this does not rest entirely in our own hands. As stated by

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<sup>66</sup> Feminist geographers first alerted the discipline of the need to situate knowledge. Situating the production of geographical knowledge is a central theme of feminist research methodologies. As argued by Rose: 'the need to situate knowledge is based on the argument that the sort of knowledge made depends on who its makers are' (1997: 306).



Marcus: 'The result of ethnographic research is never reducible to a form of knowledge that can be packaged in the monologic voice of the ethnographer alone' (1997: 95). Similarly, indulging in an obsessive self-reflexive hermeneutics could threaten the research project by bringing dangers of self-centrism (Shurmer-Smith, 2002).

Rose (1993, 1997) claims that there are inherent and fundamental difficulties with the limits of subjectivity, acknowledging that there will always be the inexplicable unknown multiple self (for both researcher and researched). As warned by Dewsbury et al. (2002), it is essential not to succumb to the fallacy of correlating increased reflexivity with transparency and the subsequent notion of getting closer to the truth. Drawing on Latham:

My point is not that the interpretive work of an individual negates the aim of attempting to delineate general trends or tendencies. Rather it nudges at the need to recognise the centrality of everyday social practice in the articulation of these tendencies. (2003: 1996)

This is specifically relevant in trying to understand the practices and processes (re)producing and (re)constructing contemporary urban public space. As will be argued throughout the thesis, in order to understand the ways in which public space is produced, the dynamism, multiplicity and complexity of 'social practice' in its (re)production, is of central importance.

Ethics, broadly defined as being about 'the conduct of researchers and their responsibilities and obligations to those involved in the research, including sponsors, the general public, and most importantly the subjects of the research' (O'Connell, Davidson and Layder, 1994: 55), constitute an issue that must be dealt with in any research project (Dowling, 2000). The kind of intersubjective encounters involved in this research inevitably had ethical repercussions.<sup>67</sup> Throughout this research, informants often divulged personal details to me, raising questions about how to handle this information in a way that suited my research needs, but that would not have harmful repercussions for the informant. For example, when interviewing 'queer' users of the Pink Triangle,

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<sup>67</sup> Exposing the impossibility of the detached researcher and the inevitability of entangled subjectivities and developing friendly relations, I acknowledged the need to confront and work through some complex ethical concerns.



many would make personal comments about how difficult it was for them to 'come out', and when I could see them getting visibly upset I would refrain from asking further questions about this.

Ethical research in geography is characterised by practitioners who behave with integrity and who act in ways that are just, beneficent and respectful. In order to produce ethical research, I aimed to behave in this way. I followed Hay's suggestion that: 'Ethical geographers are sensitive to the diversity of moral communities within which they work and are ultimately responsible for the moral significance of their deeds' (2000: 37). For example, when out with a friend shopping in Newcastle, a lesbian user of the Pink Triangle who I had interviewed earlier that week came over to me to say hello. My friend asked how I knew the respondent, who was not completely 'out' to friends and family, so I had to make up another excuse to protect her identity. Whilst this illustrates a reactive response to research ethics, where possible, I took a proactive approach.

All of the respondents were aware of the nature of the research project so that they could provide 'informed consent' to their contribution and involvement in it. Participants signed consent forms, which stated that they could withdraw from the research process at any time, and that they could review and edit any quotations that I intended to use in the thesis. I have given pseudonyms to the interviewees who requested anonymity, although very few actually did (which is perhaps surprising considering the controversial nature of some of their comments). To produce research to the ethical standard required by my funding body I strictly followed their research ethics framework.<sup>68</sup> Whereas I adhered to the official ethical guidelines provided by the ESRC, Hay's guidance was followed as a general rule: 'If you can sustain the argument that your work is just, is doing good and you are demonstrating respect for others you are probably well on the way to conducting an ethical piece of work' (2000: 40).

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<sup>68</sup> This can be found at:  
[http://www.esrc.ac.uk/ESRCInfoCentre/opportunities/research\\_ethics\\_framework](http://www.esrc.ac.uk/ESRCInfoCentre/opportunities/research_ethics_framework)



### **3.6: Research as process: Accounting for change and unavoidable absences**

Many textbooks stress the importance of locating methodological procedures in the broader research process and of seeing the enterprise as 'a messy one rather than a series of neat hermetic stages' (Brewer, 2000: 2). Qualitative research cannot be broken down into a series of ordered stages, but should suitably be seen as a complex and changing process. As argued by Baxter and Eyles: 'Researchers need to be more explicit about the research process including the rationale(s) for, among other things, respondent selection, key changes in research direction and analytical procedures' (1997: 521). The actions that comprised this research process were planned and coordinated, but they were blended together imaginatively, flexibly and often in an *ad hoc* manner in order to meet the demands of pragmatics (e.g. changing the interview schedule as people had to rearrange dates) and achieve the best result. Because I paid careful attention to the research design, execution and presentation, I anticipate that the findings will be of critical value. However, some specific methodological limitations to the research require contemplation at this stage.

#### **3.6.1: Reifying material space**

One of the key methodological problems faced in using a case study approach for this project is that it could be argued to 'reify' the concrete, static and underdeveloped understanding of public space as a simply spatial entity. As stated by Staeheli and Thompson: 'The process orientation of theories that emphasise the social construction of space and place as public or private breaks down in some senses when analysts attempt to examine concrete settings' (1997: 123). However, as discussed in the case study site selection, these sites are actively marketed as 'high quality public spaces' and this project aims to critically investigate these claims. Through the empirical chapters, and the thesis more broadly, how contemporary public space can be reconceptualised will be considered and developed, and the notion of public space as a static spatial entity criticised. It is through the case study approach that public space can be 'enlivened' and its everyday nature accounted for.



### **3.6.2: Critiquing ethnography**

Ethnography as a research method has been heavily criticised by scientific researchers who highlight the subjective nature of this kind of research and advance by claiming that such subjectivity relegates any research findings to mere interpretation. As noted by Herbert: 'From this perspective, interpretation can be an overly idiosyncratic and subjective exercise, too reliant on the proclivities and orientation of the ethnographer' (2000: 558). Whilst I have noted the subjective nature of qualitative research above, the accusation that subjectivity in social science research renders the research of no use is surely overly pessimistic.

A range of postmodern critiques has successfully undermined the idea that actions and social meanings may be directly accessed and represented as an independent truth. 'The crisis of representation' (Brewer, 2000: 38), which arises from such criticisms, challenges established notions of legitimation in geography, such as validity, reliability and generalisability. However, rather than rejecting the principle of independent, knowable phenomena and a criteria against which knowledge can be judged, there is a body of thought maintaining these principles whilst at the same time accepting critiques of representation and legitimation. Following Hammersley (1992), a notion of validity can instead be based on ideas of 'plausibility', 'credibility' and 'relevance'. Taking this position, this chapter argues that knowledge and understanding is actively negotiated intersubjectively, but that interpretations are neither arbitrary nor necessarily distorted.

### **3.7: Conclusion**

This chapter has aimed to set out the methodological framework underpinning the production of this thesis. It started by working through the epistemological and ontological positions adopted, explaining their relevance in relation to the key aims, objectives and questions driving this project. Each of the qualitative methodologies used to generate data was then discussed and evaluated in turn. Charting the changing nature of the methodological framework, the



production of this thesis has been discussed as a complex and demanding process. Ensuring the generation of rigorous research, which stands up to scrutiny and is ethically sound, has raised a number of critical challenges along the way. From the inception to the execution and the final write up of this thesis, questions regarding what the project is aiming to do; how it can get there; and the limitations of its claims, have been central.

Methodology is of vital importance to each step of the research process as it fundamentally influences what any research project can hope to achieve. I anticipate that by noting the strengths and weaknesses of the methodological framework developed for this thesis, a convincing and justifiable case has been made for how I went about carrying out this research. The methodological limits of the study have been documented and the process made as transparent as possible so that others can identify any unidentified problems. However, the transparency and rigour of the methodology are not the only factors affecting the overall quality of the thesis.

The thesis will be judged by the extent to which it meets the overall aims and objectives of the project, and answers its structuring research questions, as set out in the opening chapter. It is now, therefore, appropriate to situate this work in relation to the existing literature, to provide a comprehensive overview of the state of public space within current academic and popular debates. It is essential to understand the key arguments circulating within the academy and contemporary society to ensure that a research project can fulfil its maximum impact. As argued by Jackson: 'The extent to which generalisations may be made from case studies depends upon the adequacy of the underlying theory and the whole corpus of related knowledge of which the case forms a part rather than on the particular instance itself' (1985: 171). The following chapter aims to unravel the 'whole corpus of related knowledge' existing around public space and to begin to provide an 'adequate underlying theory' for understanding public space.



## Chapter 4

### The 'Public' of Public Space

#### 4: Introduction

The previous chapter examined the primary methodological concerns involved in producing this thesis. Having outlined a series of philosophical and procedural issues influencing the methodological approach, this chapter aims to start laying the foundations for developing a critical spatial framework for understanding and investigating public space in the everyday city. In order to carry out the theoretical refinement and extension of 'public space', it is essential to explore how existing literature frames this phenomenon. This chapter, therefore, starts by unpacking some of the theoretical debates surrounding the meaning of 'public space'. It focuses specifically on how notions of 'public' are ordinarily conceptualised as one part of an interdependent dichotomy with 'private', highlighting the multiple ways in which the divide is structured. As opposed to being stable, monolithic, mutually exclusive and naturally existing categories, these commonsensical notions are represented as complex and problematic social constructions used to structure our social and material urban worlds.

Drawing philosophical debates about the public/private divide into conversation with more contemporary urban theory, this chapter outlines the key ways in which the dichotomy is used for understanding spatial divisions within the urban realm. It then moves on to discuss some of the fundamental characteristics of public space as highlighted in the relevant literature, including the centrality of the city to public space, the assumed relationship between public space and the public sphere, and contemporary challenges facing public space. That the literature charting the state of 'public space' is characterised by narratives of confusion, ambiguity, loss and decline, leads to a questioning of the usefulness of the public/private divide in understanding contemporary urban spatiality.

There are multiple models of the public/private divide operating within the



contemporary urban realm. Normative visions about what is properly 'public' and properly 'private' underlie each of these rhetorical and/or spatial divisions. That such divisions will have divergent consequences for different groups is significant, not least in relation to issues of social and spatial justice. This chapter argues that we ought to be mindful of the power relations involved in describing and prescribing space as 'public', due to the potentially exclusionary practices that such designations facilitate. However, to be able to account for these power relations, both the 'public' and 'spatial' dimensions of 'public space' must be considered. This thesis argues for a deeper engagement with the everyday life of 'public space', as opposed to seeing space as a surface which can become simply marked as 'public'.

#### **4.1: Defining 'public space'**

A central objective of this thesis is to address the conceptual confusion that characterises current definitions of 'public space'. A wide range of policy, popular and academic discourses engage – implicitly and/or explicitly – with some notion of 'public space'. Disciplines spanning the social sciences and arts and humanities – including geography, urban studies, architecture and planning, social policy, history, social and cultural theory, philosophy and politics – employ 'public space' as a subject of discussion. Given the extensive range of contexts in which the term 'public space' is used, confusion over its precise meaning should perhaps come as no surprise (Iveson, 2007).

Within existing literature, the only certainty about 'public space' appears to be the lack of consensus over what it actually is and/or was (not to mention what it should be). The opening introduction to this thesis briefly discussed this, outlining four commonly adopted models of public space – namely, the symbolic, communitarian, cosmopolitan and republican models. Throughout the extensive material debating the meaning of 'public space', few accounts remain convincing, several perplexing, many challenging and almost all different in their interpretation and representation. The complex nature of the multiple meanings of public space on offer makes it a difficult concept to define with any precision.



Many scholars researching public space tend to ignore the definitional uncertainty shrouding this elusive term. As Iveson proposes, finding out what public space means: ‘...requires considerable excavation - it is as if what constitutes public space is obvious and does not require explanation’ (2000: 5). It is astonishing how often literature deploys the term ‘public space’ without defining its object/subject of study. In most cases, the reader is assumed to already know. However, despite its taken-for-granted nature, public space neither is as commonsensical nor as straightforward as many, or one might, have assumed.

The ordinariness of ‘public space’ as an everyday term is something of significance, and far from inconsequential, in understanding its power in structuring everyday social and spatial life. ‘Public space’ is often used in such a blasé fashion that its power as a descriptive device lies in its proponents’ ability to effortlessly disguise its socially produced and socially constructed nature. Instead, public space is more often than not masqueraded as a natural, objective, pre-existing category. To use a prime example of how ‘public space’ is ingrained in everyday usage: none of the participants interviewed for this thesis ever asked how I defined ‘public space’, they instinctively accepted that spaces such as the case study sites of LIFE and BALTIC were naturally ‘public’ (something which will be challenged in the empirical chapters of the thesis).

In theory and in practice, ‘public space’ exceeds its all too often presumed characterisation as a simple, monolithic and descriptive term. On close inspection, it is a highly contested yet widely adopted concept used to categorise a diverse range of terrains and socio-spatial relations throughout the physical and social world over time. It seems to embrace locations as diverse as parks, streets, traditional town squares, contemporary city plazas, shopping malls, cafes, museums, libraries, train stations, bars and even internet chat rooms or virtual public spheres - the list is seemingly endless.

The existence of multiple understandings and potential manifestations of public space raises a number of pertinent questions: What are the connections



between these spaces? Are there any similarities or resemblances? What is it about the term 'public space' that makes it so flexible? Is this flexibility debilitating or constructive? Is it desirable or indeed possible to give a succinct definition of public space? These questions have been the preoccupation of a long line of academics, some of whose contrasting resolutions are particularly instructive in beginning to understand this everyday phenomenon.

Negt and Kluge (1993) challenge the possibility of defining 'public space' in any singular, foundational and ahistorical manner, stating the need to acknowledge the inherent differences within and between the multiple spaces captured under this 'umbrella term'. However, Benn and Gauss (1983) propose that, diverse as they are, the present meanings of 'public space' exhibit a semantic as well as historical continuity. The word 'public' derives from the Latin word *pubes*, meaning 'all people of pubic age or the whole community' (Hansen and Rosestone, 1993). In Latin, therefore, public space is a space to which all adult members of the community have access, a space that literally brings the whole community together. Looking towards the etymology of the word 'public', Madanipour argues that despite having a wide range of meanings for 'the whole community', most of them make reference to a large number of people - '*populus*' - who are conceptualised as 'society or state, and what is associated with them' (2003: 108-9).

While interpretations of the concept have changed over time, public space, since the Greek republic, has occupied an important ideological position in democratic societies (Madanipour, 2003).<sup>69</sup> Madanipour (2003) illustrates how traditionally public spaces are the material arenas in which 'the people', used synonymously with 'the public', come together. This theme runs throughout much of the literature on contemporary cities, as exemplified by Mitchell's statement that: 'It [public space] represents the material location where the

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<sup>69</sup> This is further discussed below, specifically in relation to Habermas's (1989) notion of the 'public sphere'. The comparisons drawn between the public sphere and contemporary public space raise the question of whether the notion of the Greek *agora*, the prototype of public space in the city, in which the public concerns of the *polis* (civic) are separated from the private concerns of the *oikos* (family), holds any resonance with the public spaces of contemporary cities.



social interactions and political activities of all members of 'the public' occur' (1995: 116). There appears to be some sense of unity in meaning, despite the numerous ways and many reasons why people use these diverse spaces. In brief, for Mitchell and many others, public spaces provide 'the public' with the opportunity to engage socially and politically with one another and their surrounding environment.

Light and Smith highlight that in its broadest sense then, public space is 'nothing more than the physical space to which all citizens are granted some legal rights of access' (1998: 3). As will be discussed throughout this thesis, time and again debates about public space are framed around its material existence and condition, the levels of accessibility associated with it, its ability to facilitate the public's 'right to the city' and the extent to which it mark the limits of everyday citizenship. Nevertheless, who decides upon who is granted citizenship, what is included in the legal rights of access, the forms this space takes and the functions it serves, appear to be increasingly divergent and contextually dependent. That the demarcation of space as 'public' and/or 'private' is contextually dependent is illustrative of the socially constructed nature of such designations. As different spaces present different 'publics' with divergent opportunities, depending upon the interests, mechanisms and practices framing the space as 'public' and/or 'private', we need to consider who exerts the strongest influence in deciding how spaces become defined.

Following Light and Smith, it would seem that it is the way in which the term 'public space' is often accepted so uncritically *despite* its multifaceted and often contradictory nature that makes: 'Public space...a complex matter, a fruitful topic of analysis, criticism and interpretation' (1998: 12). Only by developing an understanding of the normative role and meaning of public space in contemporary urban life can we begin to unpack its influence on how societies are structured and activated – on people's experiences and behaviour. In the first instance, generating a clearer understanding of the somewhat ambivalent 'public space' demands careful consideration of its first structuring term - that of 'public'. The way in which notions of 'public' are developed in relation to notions



of 'non-public' (i.e. private) is a fundamental factor in any understanding of 'public space'. Whilst Chapter Five will analyse the 'spatial' element of 'public space', it is to the public/private dichotomies underlying the meaning of 'public' to which this chapter now turns.

#### 4.2: The public/private divide

'Binary distinctions are an analytic procedure, but their usefulness does not guarantee that existence divides like that'  
(Douglas, 1987: 107)

The above quote is the opening line to Weintraub and Kumar's engaging and insightful edited collection of essays, entitled *Public and Private in Thought and in Practice: Perspectives on a Grand Dichotomy* (1997). In the original text, Douglas's sentiment is that dichotomies may be helpful for analytical purposes, but they do not necessarily capture the complexity of how such philosophical distinctions play out in real life. Put simply, everyday life is messier than dichotomies allow for. The multi-disciplinary contributors to Weintraub and Kumar's book take this observation to task. Their subject is the public/private distinction, a binary which, following the Italian philosopher Norberto Bobbio, is characterised as one of the 'grand western dichotomies' (Weintraub and Kumar, 1997: 1). The public/private divide is, the contributors argue, significant in the sense of being a binary opposition that is used to subsume a wide range of other important distinctions, attempting (more or less successfully) to dichotomise the social and spatial world in a comprehensive and clearly demarcated way (Calhoun, 1997; Cohen, 1997; Benn and Gauss, 1983; Low and Smith, 2006).

All of the accounts in this volume highlight that the distinction between 'public' and 'private' has been a central and characteristic preoccupation of western thought since classical antiquity. Indeed, they argue that: 'The foundational nature of this distinction has led to its centrality as a point of entry into the key issues of social analysis, moral and political debate and of the ordering of everyday life' (Weintraub and Kumar, 1997: 1; Agnew, 2005). Because of its status as a fundamental ordering device, we must be careful not to lose sight of



how the order that the public/private distinction maintains is something that must be constantly (re)produced to be able to function. Whilst this thesis will argue that the public/private divide circulates to great effect, it is nonetheless a socially constructed phenomenon and this holds particular significance for understanding how and why contemporary urban space becomes conceived, perceived and lived as 'public'.

According to Madanipour, the public and the private only make sense in relation to one another, as they are 'interdependent notions' (2003: 3). When considering what 'public space' means, we ought to be mindful that any understanding of 'public' is ordinarily set up in contrast to a notion of 'private' and vice versa. However, the reciprocal relationship between the construction of 'public' and 'private' as opposites is not as simple as it initially appears:

The conceptual vocabulary of 'public' and 'private' often generates as much confusion as it does illumination, not least because different sets of people who employ these concepts mean very different things by them - and sometimes without realising it, mean several things at once.  
(Weintraub and Kumar, 1997: 1-2)

Whilst it is not within the scope of this thesis to examine all of the models of the public/private divide discussed or implied throughout the literature - for that would be a thesis in itself - it is important to highlight the major existing models reflected in the accounts of writers on contemporary cities. Weintraub and Kumar (1997) highlight the four principal ways in which the public/private distinction is used in contemporary social, political, cultural and economic analysis (see Table 4.2.1).

As illustrated in Table 4.2.1, the alternative models of the public/private divide provide social theorists with a critical challenge when trying to decipher exactly what the two terms mean. Ultimately, such decisions are dependent upon the interpretations and focus of those using them. For example, Chapter Two of this thesis focussed on the tensions between the promotion of 'open public spaces' in government policy, and the types of gentrified 'private' spaces that were being produced by the commercial developers driving the urban renaissance. It argued that the kinds of public spaces promoted within public



policy were not necessarily 'spaces accessible to all citizens', but were often exclusionary – from the way in which they were conceived through to their spatial manifestation. Within the urban renaissance then, there is, if any, only an artificial divide between the government and the 'market economy'. In fact, the latter is directly involved in delivering the policies of the former. Even briefly restating the arguments of Chapter Two, it becomes clear that the liberal-economist model, commonly embraced in 'public policy', does not map out neatly in everyday life.

Many visions of public space bring together and blend several of the models outlined in Table 4.2.1. New Labour's urban renaissance simultaneously promotes public space as the space for 'political community and citizenship' and a space for 'sociability', incorporating elements of both the republican-virtue and public sociability models outlined below. With the existence of multiple models of the public/private divide operating within any conception of public space, some question the usefulness of the grand western dichotomy in understanding the spatiality of the contemporary city.

**Table 4.2.1: The multiple models of the public private divide**

1. The liberal-economistic model, dominant in most 'public policy' analysis and in a great deal of everyday legal and political debate, which sees the public/private distinction primarily in terms of the distinction between state administration and market economy.
2. The republican-virtue (and classical model) approach which sees the 'public' realm in terms of political community and citizenship, analytically distinct from *both* the market and the administrative state.
3. The sociability model: The approach, exemplified for instance in the work of Ariès (and other figures in social history and anthropology), sees the 'public' realm as a sphere of fluid and polymorphous sociability, and seeks to analyse the cultural and dramatic conventions that make it possible.
4. The Marxist-feminist model: A tendency, which has become important in many branches of feminist analysis, to conceive of the distinction between 'private' and 'public' in terms of the distinction between the family and the larger economic and political order - with the market economy often becoming the 'public' realm.

(Weintraub and Kumar, 1997: 7)



Wolfe (1997) is justifiably apprehensive about how the expanding literature on the problem of 'public goods', which takes its lead from classical economics, is addressing quite a different subject from the 'public sphere' of discussion and political action delineated by Jürgen Habermas or Hannah Arendt, not to mention the 'public life' of sociability charted by Philippe Ariès or Richard Sennett. He is convincing in his assertion that, in short, the grand western dichotomy is 'not unitary but protean', comprising not a single, straightforward, paired opposition, but a 'complex collection' of them, neither mutually reducible nor wholly unrelated (Wolfe, 1997: 2). Thinking about the term 'public space', one begins to see how far-reaching the impacts of such a claim can be - not least, because public space is often intrinsically related to all three dimensions of 'public' outlined above. For example, as discussed in Chapter Two, New Labour views public space as a space where the 'common good' can be arrived at, the 'public sphere' brought to fruition and the 'public life' witnessed and enacted.

Nonetheless, the subdivision of our social world and the space we inhabit into public and private spaces is one of the key features of how 'a society organises itself' (Madanipour, 2003: 1). Benn and Gauss argue that the distinction between publicness and privacy is therefore a practical one, 'part of a conceptual framework that organises action in our social environment' (1983: 5). Unfortunately, because they are used with more frequency than precision, the widespread invocation of 'public' and 'private' as organising categories is not usually informed by a careful consideration of the meaning and implications of the categories themselves. Even when there is a sensitivity shown towards this issue, those who draw on one or another version of the public/private distinction are rarely attentive to, or even clearly aware of, the wide range of alternative frameworks within which it is employed. This leads us back to a fundamental problem: 'When different fields of publicness are allowed to operate in mutual isolation, or when their categories are casually or unreflexively blended, confusion or even absurdity is generated' (Weintraub and Kumar, 1997: 2-3). Endeavours to depict what public space is, or to stipulate what public space ought to be, are no exception (Iveson, 2000).



Elshtain notes that the content and range of public and private vary with competing modes of social thought and ways of life, arguing that: 'Although one finds widespread disagreement over the respective meanings of public and private within and between societies, no society is without some form of public/private division' (1997: 167). To think with even modest coherence about human life contemporaneously, is to be concerned about the integrity of that which is public and that which is private; but we need to begin by recognising that the line between them cannot be drawn easily or definitively in space. In essence, a division between 'public' and 'private' has been a key device used by social theorists in analysing social relations, but it is not always clear how this critical dualism relates to 'actual public spaces' in the city (Tonkiss, 2005: 5). In short, any discussion of public and private should begin by recognising, and trying to clarify, the multiple and ambiguous character of its subject matter.

To begin to develop a critical spatial model for understanding contemporary public space, some consideration of how the divide between public and private space is theorised is essential. Iveson (2007) argues that at the deepest and most general level, lying behind the public/private dichotomy are (at least) two fundamentally and analytically quite distinct kinds of imagery in terms of how 'private' space contrasts with 'public' space. First, the public/private distinction is used in reference to *distinct realms of social life*, which are delineated using two criteria:

1. What is hidden or withdrawn versus what is open, revealed and accessible.
2. What is individual, or pertains to the individual, versus what is collective, or affects the interests of a collectivity.

On the one hand, public space is a space that is openly accessible to all citizens, a space that is there for collective action. On the other hand, private space is a space of withdrawal from the collective; it is a space that caters for the individual and their personal needs. As argued by Iveson: 'When we describe actions taking place 'in public' or 'in private', public and private are understood as different contexts for action with different forms of visibility' (2007: 15).



The differences in principle may be clear enough, but the two can easily blur into one another in specific cases and combine in various ways, challenging these simple distinctions. For example, tensions exist over whether what is private is something which the individual chooses to 'withdraw' from public e.g. family life (Young, 1990), or something which the collective attempts to exclude and must therefore remain 'hidden' from public e.g. non-heterosexual sexual behaviour (Warner, 2000). It could be both, but given the different causal mechanisms at work - namely retreat in relation to family life and exclusion in relation to sexual performance - whether it is useful to classify both as simply upholding 'privacy' in space is questionable. It is important to examine the mechanisms and practices that enable different forms of 'publicness' and 'privacy' in space. As will be further discussed in the empirical chapters of the thesis, one must consider the different effects and consequences of divergent outcomes, in order to account for who is protected within existing systems of privilege operating to produce specific divisions between public and private in and through space.

Secondly, Iveson illustrates how the public/private dichotomy is often *applied* to space as both a descriptive and prescriptive device, arguing that both of these applications are fundamentally normative:

It might seem relatively obvious that prescriptions involving publicness and privacy have a normative content. For example, ordinances against nudity in public space clearly invoke norms about what constitutes appropriate behaviour in places where one's body is visible to others. But descriptive applications are no less normative.  
(2007: 16)

He notes how public space is used as a descriptive device in the sense that a 'topographical approach' to it has been developed. For example, within planning, it is often assumed that public and private spaces are evident in the physical landscape, to the extent that they can be divided by colouring them in on a map e.g. 'blue for public, pink for private' (Iveson, 2007; Warner, 2002).

I encountered this approach throughout the primary research component of this thesis. Several town planners showed me 'birds eye plans' of Newcastle city centre – where 'public spaces' were coloured in green. To be categorised as a



'public space' on the plan, the spaces had to conform to a certain criteria: 'They have to be open areas owned or managed by the Council or some other relevant public authority' (Howe, pers. comm., 2005).<sup>70</sup> For the planners, the main concern seemed to be that: 'Newcastle doesn't have enough green spaces', 'the number of public spaces is too small'. There was much less concern about what 'public space' actually means and how the public spaces that did exist were actually functioning. This is something which Chapter Six will argue is problematic, however, the central issue for this chapter is that a static and restrictive 'topographical approach' to public space is often dominant within approaches towards it. Despite the number of problems Iveson has with this approach, that it underplays the nature of the power relations operating within such descriptions is particularly significant.

The topographical approach takes the existence of public and private space as almost natural, and certainly identifiable and locatable material phenomena. Iveson's (2007) criticism of this simplistic conceptualisation is linked to the insights of Benn and Gauss who state that: 'Publicness and privacy necessarily presuppose norms, and any application of them will be contextually related to some particular norms' (1983: 11). Following Benn and Gauss, it would seem that descriptive applications of publicness or privacy are no less normative than prescriptive applications: 'To describe an object as private (or public) implies that it satisfies some, at least, of a bounded set of conditions specified in the norms, without which the normative implications would not hold' (1983: 12). The classifications of some space or interest as 'public' rather than 'private' inevitably invokes norms about what is properly 'public' or 'private'. Iveson argues that to describe a street as a public space also 'implies that streets are places where norms proscribing nudity in public apply – the classification or description here has a normative content' (2007: 16). It is precisely because the distinctions between public and private are essentially normative in nature that they have been a matter of continuous political and theoretical contention. That they are open to debate hints at their unstable and changing nature, something that is a key theme within this thesis.

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<sup>70</sup> Chapter Seven will further discuss this narrow-minded view of what constitutes public space.



Debates about how to 'carve up material and social worlds' between public and private are rarely innocent analytical exercises, since they often carry powerful, normative implications depending on the context and location of the activity and the perspective of those carrying it out (Weintraub and Kumar, 1997: 3). Killian (1998) argues that our ways of distinguishing public and private are heterogeneous and that the question of who gets to do the defining is itself a major part of the problem. This is a crucial concern of this thesis in its attempt to evaluate the extent to which productions of space as 'public' or 'private' affect how people navigate and experience the city. It is directly related to Harvey's (2005) concern about who is included in any notion of 'the public' invited into 'public space' and excluded from 'private space', as he argues that such distinctions hold particular importance in the contemporary city - not least in relation to questions of social justice. The questions of who is deciding whether spaces are public or private; what activities are to be considered appropriate in public space; which members of 'the public' are invited into 'public space'; and under what conditions they are invited in, are all very important and need to be considered.

Warner argues that: 'Dominant publics are by definition those that can take their discourse pragmatics and their life worlds for granted, misrecognising the indefinite scope of their expansive address as universality and normalcy' (2000: 88). The power relations inherent in the construction of social norms and normative ways of being are complex and will be further explored in Chapter Six in relation to sexuality. What is fundamental to note at this stage, however, is the centrality of space in understandings of what is 'public'. Whilst power can be a difficult phenomenon to observe, it often gives itself away in space. As Tonkiss argues: 'One of the most visible ways of exercising power, after all, is to occupy or control space' (2005: 60). The ability to control the categorisation of space as 'public' or 'private' is imperative to understanding the way in which power is imbued in spatial relations. For example, those who have the greatest power are those who have *both* the greatest power of access *and* the greatest power of exclusion. In other words, they exhibit the greatest control over public and private space and this includes defining specific locations in either way.



One of the great ironies that exists in discussions of public space is that its spatial dimension is often underplayed, something that this thesis aims to address.

#### 4.3: Public space and the city

The assumed relationship between public space and the urban realm is a recurring theme throughout the literature. Notions of public space seem to be synonymous with, and the equivalent of, *urban* public space. Low and Smith make this observation in their recent book, entitled *The Politics of Public Space*, stating that: 'Stretching back to Greek antiquity onward, public space is almost by definition, urban space, and in many current treatments of public space the urban remains the privileged scale of analysis and cities the privileged site' (2006: 3). Whilst common typologies of public space need not always be urban - consider paradigmatic rural 'public spaces' such as the Lake District, neighbourhood parks, suburban community gardens, village halls and greens to name a few, not to mention the current debates raging around the right to roam and the 'commons' - it is perhaps easy to see why it remains the 'privileged scale of analysis' given this history.

A theme which is present within New Labour's urban renaissance reappears in debates within urban geography and urban studies. Cities, in all of their complexity and density, are commonly represented as *the* location of *the* people i.e. the public. For many, they are the prime setting for social engagement, political discussion, cultural development and economic advancement, and all of the contentious issues that these varied processes incur.<sup>71</sup> Cities are portrayed as the cradles of civilisation and the bastions of democracy (Sennett, 1970 and Lefebvre, 1996), places of diversity, mixture and heterogeneity, where the 'other' or the 'stranger' can be encountered (Tonkiss, 2003), attributes that are often directly associated with notions of 'public space'. Fitzsimmons (1989) has even accused European intellectuals in general of being anti-rural and biased towards using the urban as a metaphor for everyday life more broadly -

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<sup>71</sup> The possibility for diversity, integration and encountering the other/stranger are considered key characteristics of the city and public spaces, all issues which will be discussed throughout the thesis more broadly.



largely ignoring the centrality of rural life and nature. The intrinsically dynamic and inherently complex nature of the multifaceted city, and the critical challenges that it raises through its proposed excess, leads to (and continues to inspire) the creation of analytical apparatus that attempts to breakdown its multiplicity into an understandable format.

Madanipour (2003) acknowledges the centrality of the urban to the public/private divide for this very reason. He claims that despite the varying nature of the public/private divide throughout history and over cultural differences, it has always been a universal feature of cities, a way of aiding an understanding of them:

Ever since the rise of the city, with its division of labour and complex, stratified social and spatial structures, the public-private distinction has been a key organising principle helping to shape and understand the physical spaces of the cities and the social life of their citizens.

(Madanipour, 2003: 1)

The city is directly related to notions of citizenship, it is the place where citizenship is not only enacted but also enabled (see Chapter Two). As illustrated in the work of Isin (2002, 2003, 2005), the importance of the public *polis* (public space where citizens can come together) in the city (the 'difference machine') for the facilitation of citizenship and the creation of *polites*, is a historical legacy which continues to inflect understandings of the spatiality and sociality of the city and its people today.<sup>72</sup> Isin argues that: 'The city is a crucial condition of citizenship in the sense that being a citizen is inextricably associated with being *of* the city' (2002: 283). However, whilst the role of the public/private divide in understanding the city is discussed as an analytical and organisational device, its use is not always as an innocent intellectual tool, its intentions not as harmless as they may seem (not least in relation to everyday citizenship).

#### **4.4: Public space and the public sphere**

The idea of the 'public sphere' as an arena of political deliberation and

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<sup>72</sup> Isin notes that: 'The city is a difference machine insofar as it is understood as that space which is constituted by the dialogical encounter of groups formed for and against each other...' (2002: 283).



participation, and therefore as fundamental to democratic governance, has a long and distinguished history. The grand historical imagery of the Athenian *agora* as *the* physical space wherein that democratic ideal might be attained and enacted has also had an extremely powerful hold on political imaginations across societies throughout time. As a result, Harvey claims that a 'tenuous association or identity' has been forged between the proper shaping of public space and the proper functioning of democratic governance (2006: 17). However, a closer examination of the literatures discussing the public sphere and public space, which more often than not overlap yet occupy quite separate domains (Iveson, 2000), unravels the vague nature of the association between the two.

The ambiguous relationship between public space and the public sphere is a returning theme within the literature. In many academic and policy texts, public space and the public sphere are represented as being inherently related to one another in numerous and complex ways (Arendt, 1969; DCLG, 2006; Gardiner, 2004; Iveson, 2007; Mitchell, 2003; ODPM, 2003; Sennett, 1970). However, whilst for some scholars the term 'public sphere' is used synonymously with public space (Hajer, 1997) and for others, public space is viewed as the spatial manifestation of the public sphere (Sennett, 1970), for many, the relationships between the two is implied but never explained, merely being regarded as a truism.

The public sphere is widely - and often uncritically - accepted as the arena in which citizens come together for discussions and debate. It is where common concerns, ideals and opinions are circulated, acting ultimately as the place of the politics of everyday life. Public spaces are considered to provide the forums - be they city spaces such as open squares, cafes, libraries or community centres; the pages of journals, newspapers and magazines; computer or television screens - that facilitate such social and political interaction and exchange. That such an indistinct relationship is accepted without criticism has itself received critical attention. As Bondi and Domosh argue: 'There is a lack of correspondence between the public sphere and public space which many



models of public space fail to take into account' (1998: 25). This thesis argues that we need to further explore the relationship between public space and the public sphere, as opposed to taking it as a given, to consider the extent to which contemporary urban public spaces function as part of the public sphere.

To begin to understand the relationship between public space and the public sphere, it is crucial to consider what the term 'public sphere' means. The key reference point for investigating the term is Jürgen Habermas's *magnum opus*, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. First published in his native German in 1962 and translated into English to much critical acclaim in 1989, this book charts the transformation of the 18<sup>th</sup> century bourgeois ideal of the public sphere under the conditions of modernity.<sup>73</sup> Habermas depicted the 'public sphere' as constituting an area of social life, separate from the market and state apparatus, in which citizens gathered to discuss issues of the day in a free and open fashion. In his account, the 'public sphere' facilitated discussion through different 'areas' including the physical space of the town square and the sheets of diverse journals and periodicals. Whilst the 'public sphere' consisted of multiple spatialities, the spatial form of the sites of circulation was a minor concern of the public sphere, it was their ability to facilitate open discussion and debate that Habermas believed was significant.<sup>74</sup>

Within the ideal of the bourgeois public sphere, debate proceeded according to universal standards of critical reason and argumentative structure that all citizens could identify and consent to; appeals to conventional dogma or to arbitrary subjective prejudices were ruled inadmissible. Ultimately, Habermas's model of the public sphere was based on critical-rational discourse and communicative action. It was in the public sphere that the 'discursive will formation' was actualised in a manner that represented the general social interest, as opposed to a class or sectional one (Gardiner, 2004: 28). The

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<sup>73</sup> The German for public sphere, *Öffentlichkeit*, does not translate directly into public sphere or *res publica*. Rather, *Öffentlichkeit* has a much broader meaning than its English and French translations. *Öffentlichkeit* neither designates 'public property' nor a 'public arena', but a more ambivalent notion of 'publicness' which is more of a characteristic than a physical attribute.

<sup>74</sup> This could be directly linked to the fact that *Öffentlichkeit* translates into 'publicness' as an attribute, as opposed to 'public space' or 'public sphere'.



function of Habermas's 'public sphere', therefore, holds resonance with New Labour's problematic understanding of 'public space' as the space in which notions of the 'common good' can be arrived at. As argued in Chapter Two, all citizens do not enter into the 'public sphere' or 'public space' on an equal footing, or with similar needs, concerns and desires. Unsurprisingly then, it was the supposedly powerless vacuum in which Habermas's public sphere seemed to function that deservedly inspired its greatest detractors and criticism.

Gardiner (2004) presents an overview of some of Habermas's most hostile detractors. It is not the aim of this chapter to explore all of these; however, it is important to highlight the main shortcomings of Habermas's reflections on 'dialogical democracy' and the public sphere because of their relation to public space.<sup>75</sup> Postmodernists and poststructuralists, including Foucault (1996) and Lyotard (1984), reject Habermas's wish to construct a 'radicalised modernity' through the medium of communicative reason, precisely because this very goal masks a pervasive 'will to power' and threatens the irreducible value of pluralism that marks the postmodern age (see Kant's *What is Enlightenment*, 1784). Habermas's arguments have also been heavily criticised by feminist theorists like Benhabib (1992, Benhabib et al., 1995) and Fraser (1995), and queer theorists such as Warner (2002). Working broadly within the tradition of critical theory, they castigate Habermas for making oversights surrounding gender and sexuality issues, his devaluing of an 'ethics of care', or failure to acknowledge the limitations of formal rationality and representative democracy (Gardiner, 2004: 29). Like public space, the public sphere was historically

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<sup>75</sup> Giddens (1984) argues that a 'dialogic democracy' is a strong public sphere where differences are displayed and consensus is not the goal, pointing to a new politics of representation, and to the end of the nation as a homogeneous order. He states: 'The potential for dialogic democracy is... carried in the spread of social reflexivity as a condition both of day-to-day activities and the persistence of larger forms of collective organisation. Second, dialogic democracy is not necessarily oriented to the achieving of consensus. Just as the theorists of deliberative democracy argue, the most 'political' of issues, inside and outside the formal political sphere, are precisely those which are likely to remain essentially contested. Dialogic democracy presumes only that dialogue in a public space provides a means of living along with the other in a relation of mutual tolerance - whether that 'other' be an individual or a global community of religious believers' (Giddens, 1994: 115).



produced through power relations, influencing which members of the public were welcomed inside and on what terms. While many critics charge that Habermas's quest for a 'universal collective subject' (one that is constituted by rational discourse) is vulnerable to a host of objections, his ideas continued to influence future academics.

In 1970, Sennett argued that public spaces should be developed which embrace the public sphere of the city, and accommodate a wide range of city life where human contradictions, disagreements and ambiguities can be expressed and negotiated. However, just as Habermas's vision of the public sphere says very little about the structural power relations that force people apart and which promote social cleavages that preclude these sorts of interactions taking place, Sennett's view of public space is equally as dismissive of such concerns. The assertion that public space is the site of democratic political activity can arguably respect the very evasion of politics that such an assertion seeks to challenge. For this assertion does not require us to recognise, indeed it can prevent us from recognising, that the political public sphere (and public space - as will be discussed in the following chapter) is 'not only a site of discourse, it is also a discursively produced site' (Deutsche, 2002: 289). The public sphere and public space are (re)produced through power relations. As with any political arena, the power relations operating within the public sphere and public space encourages the involvement and acceptance of certain groups at the expense of excluded others (Sibley, 1995).

To use a pertinent example: Namaste successfully illustrates how public space needs to be considered as being intimately bound with the articulation of culturally sanctioned gender identities, stating that: 'The division of public and private spaces, which relies upon and reinforces a binary gender system, has profound implications for people who live outside normative sex-gender relations' (1996: 231). Traditionally, and going as far back as the ancient Greek *agora*, men were considered to be 'public' figures and were therefore welcomed into the 'public space' of the cities. However, women were conceived as 'private' figures with strong historical ties to the realm of domesticity, the



'private' home, resulting in continual relative exclusion from 'public spaces' and the debates of the public sphere. Hence, a very particular group of males determined what constituted a 'common concern' and the 'common good'.

To briefly highlight how women were excluded from the public realm: the paradigmatic term 'public woman' used to connote female prostitutes has ideological connotations. The disreputable associations of being called a 'public woman' has been argued to serve as an implicit means of discouraging women from accessing the public realm on their own terms and by themselves. However, not all means of exclusion have been so subtle (Collins, 2006). Still today, some argue that the threat of 'sexual violence' from men is used to control women's use of public space (Valentine, 1995). However, the way in which the public/private divide is structured around a gender binary does not stop there. Namaste goes on to comment on how scholars have recently extended the analysis of gay and lesbian geographies to explore 'the power relations and discursive and material processes and structures that underlie the simultaneous production of space and sexualities' (1996: 384). This will be further explored empirically in Chapter Six in relation to Newcastle's gay village, with particular reference to how sexual behaviour is structured around socio-spatial understandings of the public/private divide.

Notions of 'public', 'public space' and 'public sphere' are never present as stable objects, but the problem of knowing them has been rendered dynamic and productive. As discussed earlier in the chapter, in order to function in everyday urban life, one has to have some idea of what a public or private space is, yet one can never know it through normal, easily identifiable schemes of knowledge. Understandings of the public/private divide appear as tacit knowledge, things that are commonly accepted, but rarely talked about in an open fashion. Nevertheless, when members of the public are asked what a 'public' does or should do, or what 'public spaces' and 'public spheres' (often used interchangeably) allow for and/or encourage, they give remarkably similar responses to those advised by Sennett (1977) and others who continue to be influenced by the ideas within *Structural Transformations*. Most notably, the



interviewees incorporated into this research claimed that public space ought to bring 'the public' together to facilitate socialisation, discussion, conversation, argument and debate. That individuals rarely use public space in this way, despite commonplace misunderstandings that they do, has opened up a series of new debates.

Recently, one of the key ways in which Habermas's notion of the public sphere has been challenged is that many have argued for the abandonment of *the* public sphere, in favour of a theory of *multiple* public spheres, counterpublic spheres and alternative public spheres (Fraser, 1994; Iveson, 2007; Warner, 2002). According to Eley, the public sphere is best understood not as a universally accessible political space, but rather as 'the structural setting where cultural and ideological contest among a variety of publics takes place' (1992: 306). This underscores the heterodox and pluralistic nature of such spheres, which are often in opposition to the dominant public sphere. It sensitises us to the wide variety of normative ideals that regulate interaction in different areas of socio-cultural life. That the public sphere is perhaps constituted by multiple spatialities that do not always overlap and coalesce will be a key theme of the empirical chapters of the thesis.

Habermas's stress on the relatively monolithic, overarching public sphere characterised by specific regulative mechanisms for rational debate and consensus building, according to this view, actively 'suppress sociocultural diversity in constituting an arena inimical to difference' (Asen, 2000: 425). Public spheres are multi-spatial, multi-genre, multi-media and unfolding through time. They are different spaces, some of which are spaces of difference (Young, 1990). Warner (2006) claims that it is for this very reason that the metaphor of space is unhelpful. However, this thesis argues that if public is a fiction, characterised by an imaginary uptake which holds salience in the consciousness of people the world over (Warner, 2006), it is precisely its spatial expression that allows this fiction to make it work in the way Warner advocates.<sup>76</sup> Put simply, we need to take seriously the spatiality of 'public

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<sup>76</sup> For Warner (2006), the habit of thinking about widely different spaces and different practices



space' and the 'public sphere'.

As Low and Smith argue, the respatialisation of our sense of the public sphere would bring with it the opportunity for a more complete 'repoliticisation of the public' than would otherwise be available (2006: 7). This is increasingly important, not least because the idea that public space should serve as a setting for reasoned debate and rational politics is argued to be 'slipping out of view' (Light and Smith, 1998: 6). The experience of public space belies an abrupt distinction between public and private spheres and spaces. Any understanding of public space is an imperative for understanding the public sphere and vice versa. As Mitchell points out, we need to provide a 'more geographical dimension' to the very notion of 'public sphere' (2003: 34). There is a pressing need to 'connect the concepts of public space and public sphere rather than blurring the distinction between them' (Iveson, 2000: viii), or as Iveson states, simply 'put publics in their place' (2007: 5). This is an explicit ambition of this thesis, as the spatiality of public will be critically explored, in an attempt to create a critical spatial model for investigating and understanding contemporary urban public space.

Habermas's ideal of the public sphere is as a place where democratic decisions are made through communication and negotiation as opposed to domination and oppression. The pitfalls of such an approach have been highlighted above. However, understandings of public space, such as that proposed by New Labour, continue to relate such characteristics to well functioning public spaces. Scholars advocating the creation of the 'just city' rehearse the importance of a healthy and functioning public sphere, especially its purportedly spatial component i.e. public space (Lees, 2004; Mitchell, 1995; Ruddick, 1996). As stated by Amin and Thrift: 'Some notion of the 'right to public space' is either implicit or explicit in more recent attempts to develop Lefebvre's (1996) concept of a 'right to the city' in charting the possible contours of a democratic urbanism' (2002: 23). At the heart of many visions of public space is the belief that it plays

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in different media - in continual temporality and temporal circulation - all belonging equally to a thing called 'public' is, he argues, the imaginative uptake without which 'public' in the modern sense could not exist.



a major role in enabling and maintaining a democratic society.

Good cities are viewed as those that comprise a variety of public spaces that are open to all, and in the best cases of urbanity, extend the right to carry out one's desired actions while recognising the presence and rights of others. What Lefebvre calls the 'right to the city' encompasses the right to freedom, to individualisation, to habitat and inhabit alongside collective living and action (1996: 173), as well as rights to participation and appropriation (Franck and Stevens, 2007; Purcell, 2003). The role of public space is viewed as fundamental to the creation and (re)generation of 'good cities' as it is the primary setting in which such activities take place (Amin, 2006). This belief continues to underpin national urban policy agendas, as discussed in relation to current British urban policy in Chapter Two, where public spaces are revealed as both a key tool for and ambition of New Labour's attempt to create successful urban areas.

That public space serves as a setting for and topic of struggles over the 'right to the city' is a recurring theme within this thesis. Iveson (2003) illustrates how public spaces are essential in the functioning of a healthy public sphere acting not just as the space of participation and inclusion, but also as the place in which the discussion of the 'terms' of inclusion have been the object of political struggle. For Mitchell (1995), this is an essential element of public space as he views it as the space of justice. It is not only the space where the right to the city is struggled over; it is where it is implemented and represented. However, despite the 'publicness' of public space, the right to pursue activities other than those which are deemed acceptable, expected or predetermined is by no means guaranteed; 'it is often hard won' or impossible to achieve (Franck and Stevens, 2007: 27).

Whilst public spaces may be legally accessible to all citizens, not all citizens are welcomed into public space equally. Mitchell (1995, 2001) acknowledges the utopian nature of the view of public space as a space where all citizens can come together on an equal footing to discuss a 'common future'. He argues



that it is where such a utopia is given both spatial form and social life, stating: 'Utopia is impossible, but the ongoing struggle towards it is not' (Mitchell, 2001: 235). In short, public spaces are often considered the prime locations for the *potential* discussion and debate of political issues, spaces where political appropriation and representation *might* be demonstrated and debated. However, one of the most recent themes in the literature charting the changing nature of the contemporary city is the demise of public space as a place for political discussion, debate or demonstration.

#### **4.5: The privatisation of public space: Depoliticisation, commodification and sanitisation**

Commercial developers are progressively receiving the *carte blanche*, from more traditional public stewards such as Councillors and town planners within local and national government, to transform urban public spaces under the urban renaissance agenda. Many argue that this is leading to the creation of 'pseudo public spaces', spaces where the limit of 'publicness' is clearly marked. For example, Rogers warns that city-renewal is increasingly changing the wider normative concepts of 'publicness' underpinning the city centre according to the 'preferences of particular commerce-friendly activities and demographics' (2005: 324). Spearitt (2000) proposes that in relation to such changes the *consumer* has replaced the *citizen* as the ideal user of public space. The conflict between use and exchange value, as demonstrated in commercial spaces, is crucial to the shaping of cities both spatially and socially, and is particularly visible in transfers from public to private space (Logan and Molotch, 1987).<sup>77</sup>

Recently 'boundaries' between what is public or private have become even 'less clear' as incursions by privatisation and other neo-liberal practices have been transforming public space, placing it back into corporate or commercial space (Low, 2006: 82). The ethos of city marketing and privatisation drives such

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<sup>77</sup> The tension between exchange and use functions of contemporary public space will be further debated in the empirical chapters of this thesis where primary observations into the exclusionary outcomes of such processes are made.



developments, and due to their profit-motivated nature tend inevitably to transform places into a commodity (Aurigi and Graham, 1997). It is precisely the way in which space has been turned into a commodity that Madanipour sees as the 'primary causal factor' in the stratification of society, which has led to socio-spatial segregation through increasing privatisation (2003: 149). The new systems of ownership brought about by privatisation processes demarcate spaces as accessible to those publics who can afford to buy into them. That these commercial spaces are 'privately' owned is arguably making them less 'publicly' accessible.

At the structural level of the political economy and the production of space (Lefebvre, 1991), privatisation results in private institutions generating an 'aesthetics of order' (Navarez, 2007: 162). It is this aesthetics of order, produced by non-inclusive corporate power, that Navarez (2007) argues creates contrived public space. There is a movement towards the stringent control and management of the types of user groups welcomed into contemporary urban public space. Such spaces are set up in contradistinction to the public spaces provided by democratic representatives, which are often naively viewed as ideally being open to all. The genuine concern of academics witnessing the privatisation of the city and the exclusions it harbours is founded upon the belief that people with legitimate democratic intention had historically controlled public spaces.<sup>78</sup> The extent to which historical public spaces were ever openly accessible to all citizens has been questioned (Robbins, 1990); however, the extent to which such aspirations continue to circulate with wide effect is indisputable.

In the city public, according to its advocates: 'Public institutions and public spaces were seen as providing symbols for a sense of community and civic morality that overrode the individual commercial interests of the inhabitants of the city' (Davidson, 1994: 4). This vision of the city has been incredibly influential in recent public space debates in urban studies, where the

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<sup>78</sup> This is something that has itself been challenged, for example, Chapter Two noted the derogatory comments made by a professional planner at Newcastle City Council towards the involvement of local people in the planning process.



commercialisation of public space is said to undermine the genuinely inclusive public city precisely because it 'supplants citizenship with consumer status in determining access' (Iveson, 2007: 37). As consumption becomes the 'primary urban function' (Christopherson, 1994: 410), it follows that spaces of private consumption are heavily influencing the design and purpose of the contemporary city. Public spaces have been created that are intentionally unusable or exclusionary to prevent them from becoming habitations for 'undesirables'. As argued in Chapter Two in relation to CABE's design-led agenda, the form and function of public spaces hint at the kinds of people that they aim to attract.

Urban design is sometimes used as a mechanism of social control within the public spaces of the contemporary urban realm. To take a paradigmatic example of this, drawing on the work of Davis (1994), the creation of rolling benches that are near impossible to lie on is an attempt to keep homeless people, who sometimes rely on them as substitute beds, out of the premium spaces of the city. However, such activities and the individuals that perform them will simply be displaced to different (less salubrious) parts of the city, or to different cities where environments are more conducive to such respite. Public space is increasingly designed and managed with particular users and uses in mind. It appears that within the contemporary urban realm only certain citizens are welcomed to enact their 'right to the city'. Design interventions are only the tip of the iceberg in beginning to chart the management and regulation practices aimed at excluding undesirable groups from city centre public spaces.

Those perceived not to belong in the increasingly purified pseudo-public spaces, especially commercial spaces, now risk being monitored and harassed using private policing systems, losing their right as citizens, just because they are not seen to be lucrative enough as consumers (Fyfe and Bannister, 2001). These spaces, perhaps somewhat ironically, take full advantage of the sense of loss of public life, to create nostalgic, idealised and active, but also safe and sanitised public space. Killian describes these spaces as 'consumable visions of civility accessible to all who can meet the price of admission and agree to



adhere to a strict set of rules and conduct' (1998: 119; Iveson, 2007; Lees, 2002, 2004, 2005). The result is the sometimes subtle (and often not so subtle) privatisation of public space as commercial imperatives define 'acceptable' behaviour excluding those who distract from the consumption experience, the iconographic figure frequently documented in the literature being the homeless person (Ruddick, 1996; Smith, 1996). Whilst there is no doubt urban public spaces are increasingly driven by exchange value, it is important not to undermine the human agency of individuals who can challenge the dominant structures of a space through use value.

The way socio-spatial interrelationships are perceived and experienced, and the way meanings of spaces are produced, is not simply determined by their developers and designers, but to a similar extent by the '(non)consumers' (Hajer and Reijndorp, 2001: 49). However, the argument is that public spaces, which are (often falsely) purported as being traditionally designed for the many, are increasingly legislated for by the few. Moreover, this in itself is a deterrent for less affluent citizens who cannot afford the entry into the newly designed pseudo-public spaces (price being marked in terms of social, cultural, and economic capital) (Amin and Thrift, 2002). Most western cities can now offer new, apparently 'public,' urban districts which are, in fact, privately managed, geared towards affluent consumers, and marketed as trouble free, lifestyle 'packages' sanitised and segregated from the troubled, polarising urban realm that often surrounds them (Aurigi and Graham, 1997: 50). In a symbiotic relationship, Tonkiss argues that the subsequent shrinking of public space is both a 'symptom' of the reduced status of publicness as a social value, and a 'key agent in its erosion' (2005: 74).

These pseudo-public spaces grant the individual access to commodities, experiences and knowledge of nature and history, but they seldom encourage strangers to approach one another (Light and Smith, 1998). To the great annoyance of many social critics, the middle class has supposedly chosen to preserve its social complacency in pleasant places protected by mechanisms of social filtration. Low et al. argue that in relation to public space, such social



filtration has far-reaching effects:

We realise that it is one thing to talk about comfort and vitality and quite another thing to discuss race, ethnicity, class [and this thesis will argue sexuality] and exclusion. However, these difficult issues are becoming increasingly pressing as private groups take over from public agencies in planning, designing and managing large public spaces.<sup>79</sup> (2005: 185)

If different types of public space stand for different ways of being together in public space (collectivity, social exchange, informal encounter), the privatisation of public space valorises relationships based on private interests. This raises a number of questions that will be discussed throughout the empirical chapters of the thesis. For example: Can such exclusive consumption outlets be classed as public spaces? Do such transformations bring questions of the relationship between public and privacy to the fore? How do public spaces in the contemporary city call for new conceptualisations?

#### **4.5.1: Public space: A space of exclusions**

How technology has influenced contemporary urban public spaces is a pre-eminent topic for debate, specifically its role in the control and regulation of user behaviour. In 1961, Jacobs argued firmly for the importance of having 'eyes on the street' in order to allow for the development of a public culture and the encouragement of flourishing public spaces. Jacobs believed that spaces that were populated by members of 'the public' not only made other users feel safe due to the likelihood of sinister or criminal behaviour being repressed in the condition of co-presence, but also that this co-presence would lead to sociability. Whilst the shortcomings of such ideals were clearly criticised then, the recent proliferation of new sets of 'eyes on the street' in the form of CCTV surveillance systems has broadened the terms of the debate.

As argued in Chapter Two, the rhetoric of risk and security is used within public policy to explain away some of the restrictive design practices that are being rolled out across our cities. A common theme within the literature is the

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<sup>79</sup> Public agencies also have their own prejudices and can be just as discriminatory as private corporation, often turning a blind eye to those of the private developers operating in their area- perhaps due to a general consensus with their beliefs (see Chapter Six).



growing concern about justifications for the use of new technologies, such as CCTV, in public space being based on arguments that they protect the public by decreasing personal risk (Bannister et al., 2006; Toon, 2000). The question of security is central to the politics of public space and its privatisation, and the use of CCTV systems and private policing regimes is often viewed with mounting cynicism, particularly by left academics and an increasingly suspect public. Graham and Marvin use Newcastle as an example of a small European city: 'Where the differences among the 'rich' and the 'poor' areas are increasing, the feeling of uneasiness in public space, and diminishing sense of security and cohesion that accompany social polarisation, lead to large parts of the city being covered by CCTV systems' (1996: 27). Graham and Marvin argue that CCTV cameras are privileging the 'right to the city' of certain members of the public at the expense of others, as marginal groups are increasingly characterised as a potential 'risk' to the safety and enjoyment of the broader public.

Whilst the impacts of the use of CCTV are highly disputed, many scholars highlight the intrinsic problems associated with the very *idea* of the technology itself. Low et al. argue that the use of what were once considered 'Big Brother technologies' and infringements on civil liberties, are now widely treated as necessary for 'public safety' - with little examination of the consequences (2005: 2). Boddy states that under the ever-imposing gaze of CCTV (and the often prejudiced and discriminatory gaze of its operators - see Fyfe and Bannister, 1998), visions that the public spaces of the city 'symbolise public life, with all its contact, conflict and tolerance' will be difficult to sustain (1992: 123). Moreover, the urbanist Mike Davis fervently argues that that the universal consequence of the 'crusade to secure the city' is the destruction of any truly democratic public space (1992: 155).

Some initiatives that curtail diversity of uses and users - ostensibly to improve safety in public space - are complicated because they are intended to increase freedom *from* fear and freedom *from* violent crime, but at the same time these measures decrease freedom *to* - freedom to engage in activities that may seem



threatening to social order or that require privacy and freedom *from* surveillance cameras (Dovey, 1999; Lees, 2004). As Lees states: 'Ironically efforts to foster genuine public culture on the street often subvert that very goal, as efforts to secure urban space stifle its celebrated vitality and diversity' (2003b: 614). Ultimately, the onslaught of neoliberalism and the increasing commodification of space can lead to the development of sanitised landscapes, as particular behaviours and people are removed or made to feel unwelcome in the contemporary city. There are far reaching consequences from this, not least in the form of simultaneously social and spatial exclusions.

Light and Smith argue that deviance and convention, exclusion and power, are persistent components in the 'perpetual permutations of public space' (1998: 13). The following chapter will illustrate how public spaces are sites which are constantly (re)negotiated and (re)produced, never stable and always in flux. However, those who write about the representative role of public space are concerned with the exclusions, which are often created by the definition of the 'appropriate use of public space' set by powerful stakeholders (Killian, 1998: 118). An aesthetics of order operates in many public spaces through the enforcement of high standards of maintenance, surveillance and beautification. The possibilities of difference that public space affords seem to pose threats and thus in many instances are contained, pre-empted or disciplined. Even though this order is not absolute, it does regulate use and behaviour. Unexpected looseness, those aspects of the experiences of a place that are spontaneous and different from the 'normality' of everyday life - loose parts, incidents, events and people - are constantly monitored and quickly controlled or assimilated into the planning and programming of public space by the organisations and institutions that manage them (Naverez, 2007).<sup>80</sup>

MacLeod (2002) argues that in the fanatical search to contrive a sanitised urban landscape, the city's elite appears to be suspending any remaining managerialist commitments to extend social citizenship and spatial justice

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<sup>80</sup> Chapter Five will argue that despite the pervasive resulting strategies of the aesthetics of order, public space still offers possibilities for the strange, unfamiliar and unexpected, making public spaces the sites of complex and contradictory experiences (see Naverez, 2007).



throughout the wider populace (see also McInroy, 2000). In fact, MacLeod develops this argument further, claiming that: 'If we search beneath the euphemistic hype and superficial glamour - if in Katz's (2001) terms we endeavour to 'unhide' the consequences of neoliberalism - we gradually unravel some distressing geographies of exclusion' (2002: 612). As those public spaces that offer forums for debating norms, critically engaging ideas, making private issues public and evaluating judgements disappear under the 'juggernaut of neoliberal policies', it becomes crucial for progressives to raise fundamental questions about what it means to revitalise a politics and ethics that take seriously 'such values as citizen participation, the public good, political obligation, social governance and community' (Giroux, 2001: xi).

Who is felt to belong and not to belong in public space, contributes in an important way to the shaping of social space (Sibley, 1995). However, mere *appearance* in public space is not equivalent of *access* to public space (Painter and Philo, 1995). The fact that people are 'allowed in' to public space does not necessarily ensure their inclusion into public space and the public of that space - the terms and conditions of access must be assessed. We must be sensitive to the subtleties of how such inclusions and exclusions operate, since 'repressive and exclusionary authority can vary in form from being 'covert' to being 'negotiated', to being 'persuasive', to outright 'force and disappropriation' (Franck and Stevens, 2007: 94). Another key area of discussion is the way in which excluded groups withdraw from mainstream public spaces and create counterpublics of their own. Counterpublics will be discussed more fully in Chapter Six, but at this stage, it is interesting to note that rather than exacerbating sociospatial polarisation through the creation of exclusive enclaves and nodes, the development of truly public spaces is expected to promote 'a degree of tolerance and social cohesion' (Madanipour, 2003: 148).

Iveson (2003) has made an instructive breakthrough in understanding public space and the exclusions it harbours. He claims that one of the most important aspects of a model of public space is that it can *distinguish between* instances of exclusion. The important question becomes not '*whether* exclusion occurs,



but rather *how* it is justified and enforced' (Iveson, 2000: 214, emphasis in original). Drawing on the case study of McIvers baths in Sydney (where men are excluded from a women only swimming pool), Iveson argues that there is no reason to think that 'attempts to manage a threat by externalising it cannot exist with attempts to transform more open public space' (2003: 269). This echoes many of the arguments presented by 'queer' writers (see Chapter Six) who argue that marginal groups often use mechanisms of exclusion to create specialised enclaves for minority groups. These counterpublic spaces are seen as the training ground for oppressed groups so that they have the time and space to generate a sense of confidence in their way of being before they enter into the mainstream where they are often chastised. The benefits and shortcomings of counterpublics will be discussed further in Chapter Six, with specific reference to Newcastle's gay village.

Following the erosion of 'publicness' as a quality of the contemporary urban realm through increasing privatisation; the multiple meanings of 'public' underlying the various models of public space on offer; and the manifold spaces falling within the umbrella term 'public space' throughout time and across space, some have questioned the usefulness of the public/private divide in understanding the contemporary social and spatial order.

#### **4.6: How useful is the 'grand western dichotomy'?**

Light and Smith (1998) argue that we need a more nuanced way of discussing space than the dichotomised public/private conception, not least because the language of the divide is at times imprecise, even opaque. Whilst some argue that today the public/private dichotomy cannot adequately express the full complexity of contemporary urban space and our experience of living in it (Wilson, 2001), others argue that it has never been adequate in describing the socio-spatial relations of the city (Robbins, 1990). That the theoretical divide between public and private is often artificially imposed upon empirical spaces such as the everyday urban landscape is, quite rightly, heavily criticised. For example, Arendt draws attention to the inability to divide space in such a rigid way: 'In the modern world the two realms constantly flow into one another like



waves in a never-resting process of life' (1988: 33). We need to build and refine theories of public space through detailed empirical research that begins to question the extent to which the public/private divide is an accurate way of representing everyday space. This is an explicit ambition of the empirical chapters of this thesis.

A high resolution analysis of space will show that 'public' and 'private' spaces do not exist as such, but that 'publicness' and 'privacy' are power relations that play out in, through and across space, with all spaces containing elements of them both. The two case study sites used in this research will illustrate that they do not simply exist as public and/or private spaces, but produce the opportunities to enact both sets of relations at different times and in different ways. We do not move from public to private: rather we are constantly within both, simultaneously protecting ourselves from absorption into the public through the power of privacy (exclusion) and asserting ourselves into the public (accessibility). The spatial negotiations that take place as part of this process deserve further attention and the following chapter attempts to work through some of them. Of particular importance is the extent to which human spatial negotiations operate within a broader framework of how individuals relate to space, depending on whether they (and others) conceive it as 'public' or 'private'.

As Fraser argues, it is essential to note that the terms 'public' and 'private' are not straightforward designations of societal spheres, but are 'cultural classifications and hence rhetorical labels' (1992: 131). Subsequently, they are inherently imbued with power relations and ideologically laden, hence often context dependent. It is insufficient to consider public and private as situated at opposite and exclusive ends of a pre-existing continuum. Publicity and privacy are not merely characteristics of space; rather, they are expressions of power relations in space. This understanding can be used to avoid a problem typical of empirical work involving 'public space' that usually begins with a space that is assumed public or private, rather than analysing whether it is (Killian, 1998). As discussed in the previous chapter, this issue raises some methodological as



well as theoretical issues for this thesis, specifically in relation to how the chosen case study sites are to be understood.

Indistinctness of boundaries is an inherent quality of space and the struggle to reorganise divisions and meanings assigned to them. Nevertheless, it is widely accepted that public and private are very necessary categories underlying any understanding of the social world, and therefore need to be understood in all their complexity (Killian, 1998). As argued by Warner: 'Attempts to frame public and private as sharp distinction or antinomy have invariably come to grief, while attempts to collapse or to do without them have proven equally unsatisfying' (2002: 28-9). So, whilst their application in western society has been criticised, 'public' and 'private', no matter how complicated or ambiguous their academic application, retain enormous descriptive power on an everyday level.<sup>81</sup>

As McDowell argues: 'the division between public and private...is a socially constructed division; and, as such, it is important to examine the process by which it is formed at specific moments and places' (1999: 149; Drummond and Rydstrom, 2004). The processes through which spaces become 'public' are discussed in relation to BALTIC and LIFE in the empirical chapters of this thesis. Arguing that public space is 'produced' does not avoid the necessity of explaining how publicness and privacy operate within existing material spaces, taking into account the material and immaterial processes producing the space. However, in order to begin to explain the generative processes constructing space as 'public', we require a spatial framework that is capable of accounting for the conceived, perceived and lived dimensions of 'public space'.

#### **4.7: Conclusion**

In order to produce a greater understanding of what is meant by the term 'public space', this chapter started by addressing its definitional uncertainty. Whereas, public space appeared to exist in multiple forms, serving diverse functions

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<sup>81</sup> One of the biggest defences of the importance of the public and private dichotomy is the continuing claim by feminists and proponents of queer politics (which will be discussed in Chapter Six) that these two categories have been used very effectively to empower minority groups.



across time, it appeared to exhibit a semantic and historical continuity (Madanipour, 2003). Highlighting the interdependent relationship between definitions of public and private, this chapter has argued that while the public/private distinction is inherently problematic and often treacherous, frequently confusing and potentially misleading, it is also a powerful instrument of social analysis and moral reflection, if approached with due caution and conceptual self-awareness. It is an inescapable element of the theoretical vocabularies, as well as the institutional and cultural landscape, of modern societies. Thus, it can neither be conveniently simplified nor usefully avoided.

The variability, ambiguity and difficulty of the public/private distinction ought to be recognised and confronted, alongside an appreciation of its richness and apparent indispensability (Weintraub and Kumar, 1997). This is important in relation to its impact upon concepts of public space. As Light and Smith effectively summarise in relation to the complexity of the public/private dichotomy: 'What is clearer is that public space is mutable, subject to regular change in its form and definition. It has never been static' (1998: 12). While Light and Smith are astute in recognising that public space is something continuously undergoing transformation, being refashioned in numerous and often-conflicting ways, within existing literature it is routinely characterised by its urbanity and notions of loss and decline.

The literature charting the decline of public space is not easily separable from conflicts over rights of access, but it is ultimately more troubling than any amount of vagrancy, litter or vandalism, because it reveals a growing inability of individuals to 'imagine themselves as a public' (Light and Smith, 1998). The degrading, disappearance, and policing of public spaces does not simply question what such spaces are for, but also what the public itself might mean and whom it might include. In this sense, the prohibitions that operate in public space mark the limits of everyday spatial citizenship. While concepts of public space are often considered to capture certain 'principles of equality and inclusion', the real life of public spaces shows how social distinctions work through spatial exclusions (Tonkiss, 2005). It is the ways in which the power



relations behind such distinctions become spatialised that is of central concern in attempting to understand the multiple models of contemporary urban public space.

Unsurprisingly, the numerous models of public spaces deployed in academic and policy literature are often premised on incompatible assumptions, making their transportation and replicability across different urban terrain highly questionable (Iveson, 1998). A direct consequence of this is that fashioning high quality public spaces out of the multifarious and often opposed models on offer, leaves those with an interest in developing such spaces facing a range of critical challenges, in the design, management and regulation of public spaces. As proposed by Carr et al.: 'The relationship of public space to public life is dynamic and reciprocal and new forms of public life require new spaces' (1992: 43). Unfortunately, at present, despite repeated calls to reinstate the importance of public space for well functioning urban locales, many of the models of public space on offer fail to appreciate the spatiality of the relationship between 'public life' and 'public space'.

Gaining a clearer comprehension of how relations of 'publicness' and 'privacy' operate within and constitute the everyday spaces of the contemporary urban realm, the ways in which public space is (re)produced and (re)articulated can be revealed. By considering the social and spatial (re)production of public space, a toolkit for understanding the complexities of the practico-materiality of the city can be developed, something that could aid both urban scholars and practitioners. The following chapter aims to develop a critical spatial model that can be used to understand the contemporary public urban realm. Quite simply it aims to look at and account for the spatial dimension of 'public space'.



## Chapter 5

# Spatialising Public Space

### 5: Introduction

A key aim of this thesis is to develop a critical spatial framework that can be used to investigate and account for contemporary urban public space. Any attempt at generating a more complete understanding of what the concept of 'public space' means must begin by unpacking its foundational terms. Whereas the beginning of the previous chapter primarily focussed on describing and critically analysing the multiple meanings of the notion of 'public', this chapter closely turns its attention to the term 'space'. This chapter argues that the 'spatial' nature of 'public space' requires closer consideration, calling for a more critical engagement with theories of space production to better understand this everyday phenomenon.

Drawing on the work of the French social theorist, Henri Lefebvre, the 'four major paradigms' historically used to understand space are introduced and rejected as overly simplistic when considered in isolation from one another. Instead of existing as an abstract thought, a signification of meaning, a container for action or instrumental reason, 'space' is a multidimensional entity constituted through a combination of all of these elements. Using Lefebvre's (1991) 'unitary theory' of space, based upon a conceptual triad of spaces of representation, representations of space and spatial practice, the possibility of accounting for the perceived, conceived and lived dimensions of public space is demonstrated.

With over 30 years since the publication of much of Lefebvre's highly influential works, a number of key concerns raised by contemporary spatial theorists are also considered. How understandings of contemporary urban public space, as displayed in recent literature, require a further appreciation of the interplay between social, symbolic, ideational and spatial processes is discussed. This chapter argues that contemporary theories of the 'socio-spatialisation' of space



within the urban realm facilitate a deeper and richer understanding of how public space is socially constructed and produced. By acknowledging the socially produced and socially constructed nature of space, the power relations involved in the demarcation of space as 'public' and/or 'private' can be further considered.

Working through the contestatory nature of public space, the significance of human agency, and how it is enlivened and theorised – for example, as transgression or resistance or through 'strategies' and 'tactics' (De Certeau, 1984) - is examined. The importance of power relations in the (re)structuring of the form and function of public space - something central to Lefebvre's own project - is carefully considered with particular reference to the relationship between sexuality and space in the city. The key insights from existing literature facilitate the creation of a critical spatial framework for understanding and investigating contemporary urban public space, taking into account its performative and multiplicitous nature. The spatial framework outlined in this chapter provides the foundation for approaching the empirical sites of this research. However, the critical spatial framework developed here will be refined and extended throughout the empirical chapters of the thesis, as the primary research findings are used to develop and strengthen it.

### **5.1: Defining 'space': A highly contested term**

'Space' is a ubiquitous term within disciplines spanning the social sciences, arts and humanities and natural sciences. The ease and frequency with which it is used in academic, policy and a popular debate highlights its centrality as a basic and seemingly innate concept. Because 'space' is used so expansively, so often without any thought being given to what it means, it harbours a very similar conceptual problem to that of 'public'. 'Space', like 'public', has come to be uncritically accepted as a natural entity and/or a pre-existing category. It is commonly used to define, generate and characterise understandings of everyday life. As Sack argues, the way in which 'space' is often accepted as a given in understandings of everyday life is reflective of its position as 'one of the unsaid dimensions of epistemological and ontological structures' (1980: 3).



‘Space’ is habitually portrayed as one of the basic and essential dimensions of existence itself. To exist is to exist *in space*. Rob Shields develops this fundamental idea, arguing that: ‘To question ‘space’ is to question one of the axes along which reality is conventionally defined’ (1991: 31). If space is one of the fundamental building blocks of society, something that plays a key role in any understanding of the world and indeed any comprehension of our ways of knowing the world, we ought to pay more attention to what it means. This chapter aims to do precisely this by investigating how we can begin to understand the spatiality of our existence, with specific reference to our relationship with public space.

‘Space’ finds an abundance of different interpretations and meanings, some of which are explicit whilst others remain implicit (Crang and Thrift, 2000). Whilst it is not the intention of this chapter to fully explore the insights and shortcomings of every theory used to understand space, it is important for the purpose of this thesis to highlight the main ideas encapsulated within the relevant literature on contemporary urban space.<sup>82</sup> Dimendberg (1998) provides an informed, yet concise, account of the predominant themes permeating these diverse texts by breaking them down into what he calls ‘the four major paradigms’ of space.

<p><b>Table 5.1: Dimendberg’s four major spatial paradigms:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Mentalist:</b> The belief that space can be adequately understood as a philosophical concept, if not fully reduced to one.</li><li>• <b>Textualism:</b> The idea that space can be assimilated to signification or meaning.</li><li>• <b>Containerism:</b> The belief that space is essentially empty and static, a passive and inert vessel for other forms of political, economic, cultural and social life.</li><li>• <b>Activism:</b> Understandings of space as presence, instrumental reason, and visible effect of political hegemony over people and things.</li></ul> <p>(Dimendberg, 1998: 18)</p>
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As highlighted by the ‘four paradigms’ set out in Table 5.1, ‘space’ has been

<sup>82</sup> For a more comprehensive overview of spatial theories see Crang and Thrift (2000); Hubbard et al. (2002); Massey (2005).



theorised as having physical, ideational, symbolic and instrumental dimensions. Put simply, throughout history, space has been commonly understood as an idea, a text, a container, a consequence of action and/or numerous combinations of some (but very rarely all) of these things.<sup>83</sup> Each of these basic notions has its own propagators and detractors, strengths and weaknesses. As Harvey argues:

Space turns out to be an extraordinarily complicated keyword. It functions as a compound word and has multiple determinations such that no one of its particular meanings can properly be understood in isolation from all the others.<sup>84</sup> (2006: 293)

It is through Lefebvre's work that the most effective explorations of space have taken place, resulting in the development of his 'unitary-theory' for understanding this everyday phenomenon.

## 5.2: Lefebvre's 'unitary' approach to space

As Light and Smith (1998) argue, any consideration of the philosophical implications of public space - as a physical and cognitive category - would be incomplete without an analysis of Lefebvre's monumental work of 1974, *The Production of Space* (translated into English in 1991). In *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre attempted to develop a 'unitary theory of space' that sought a 'rapprochement between physical space (nature), mental space (formal abstraction about space) and social space (the space of action, conflict and sensory phenomenon)' (Merrifield, 2000: 167). Lefebvre reviewed the 'four historical paradigms of space', rejecting them as inadequate foundations for a critical spatial theory when considered independently from one another. Dimendberg (1998) provides a succinct overview of Lefebvre's major criticisms of the 'four spatial paradigms' (see Table 5.2). Whilst this thesis does not aim to extensively explore each of these criticisms, it is important to note that they provide the foundation for one of Lefebvre's key claims:

The theory we need, which fails to come together because of the state of mere bits and pieces of knowledge, might well be called, by

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<sup>83</sup> 'Space' is a relatively recent term in Western thought. Before the seventeenth century, people tended to use words associated with 'place' e.g. *topos*, *locus*, place, locale, location etc. For an overview, see Casey (1991).

<sup>84</sup> Harvey is writing specifically about understanding space as a combination of absolute, relative and relational space.



analogy, a ‘unitary theory’; the aim is to discover or construct a theoretical unity between ‘fields’ which are apprehended separately.  
(1991: 11)

**Table 5.2: Lefebvre’s critiques of the four spatial paradigms:**

**Mentalist:** Although grasped by means of conceptual schemes and epistemological categories, space is irreducible to them, and Lefebvre rejects any theory that conflates space with the activity, product or form of thought. Kantian idealism or its transcendental interpretation of Euclidean geometry might explain certain features of space, yet their emphases on a *priori* transcendental forms of sensibility inherent in the subject elide the presence of history, including the history of their own production as concepts.

**Textualism:** A position that emerges in the work of Roland Barthes and other urban semiologists. Even legible spaces are imperfectly understood when approached as pre-determined meanings, rather than as objects and sites of production. In this rejection of the linguistic analogy as a model of cultural analysis (including his renowned hostility to structuralism) and his dialectical understanding of language as emerging through interaction between subjects, spaces and practical activity, Lefebvre’s materialist view of language and his effort to reintroduce production into the genesis of discourse can be clearly discerned.

**Containerism:** Criticising conceptions of space as metaphysically pre-given following from the Aristotelian category of *topos*, the *res extensa* of Descartes, Newton’s void, and the absolute of Leibniz, Lefebvre develops a critique of what one might call containerism.

**Activism:** Lefebvre wages a vehement attack against such understanding of space, a mode of domination over people and things he expresses through the French word *savoir*. Space exceeds what is present and visible and can exercise its effects through abstract representation and prohibitions in addition to its more tangible physical manifestations. An understanding of space can never be derived merely from perceiving it.

(Dimendberg, 1998: 19)

Ultimately, Lefebvre was deeply sceptical about approaches to space that did not account for the basic tenets of all four of the major paradigms, advocating that understandings of space must capture its physical, ideational, symbolic and instrumental dimensions. This scepticism sprung from the conviction that all four paradigms held some validity in their own right, furthering understandings of the complexities of space. According to Lefebvre, it is by drawing all of the essential dimensions together and acknowledging their inherent interrelation (not simply combinatory effect as distinct entities) that produces the most



effective framework for understanding the multidimensionality, complexity and intricacies of space production.<sup>85</sup> Subsequently, if all of these dimensions were to be involved in the production of space then they would therefore also feature in the creation of an effective spatial framework that could capture this production, namely Lefebvre's 'unitary theory'.

One should not expect a mechanical or formal spatial dialectic in *The Production of Space*, for, rather than a rigid schema, it describes a looser framework within which the production of space - and spatial knowledge - emerges (Dimendberg, 1998). Unlike the four major paradigms of space, Lefebvre aims not to produce *a* or *the* discourse on space, but rather to expose the actual production of space by bringing the various kinds of space and the modalities of their genesis within a single theory (Soja, 1996). Lefebvre (1991) argues that if we shift our attention from the conceptions of 'things in space' or 'the space things are in' to the 'actual production of space' itself, our theoretical understanding must capture the generative process of space. In sum, an authentic knowledge of space must address the question of its production.

For Lefebvre, the actual production of space (process) and the product (thing) - that is the produced space itself - present themselves as 'two inseparable aspects, not as two separable ideals' (Merrifield, 1993: 523). Shields develops this argument in his overview of Lefebvre's comprehensive collection of work on the urban environment, *Lefebvre, Love and Struggle* (1999). He claims that in *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre almost single handedly moved the analysis of 'space' 'from the old synchronic order of discourse 'on' space and social ecology to the analysis of the process by which meta-level discourses 'of' space are socially produced' (Shields, 1999: 123).<sup>86</sup> As this thesis investigates how models of 'public space' are both produced in and productive of contemporary society, the social production of space as 'public' is highly relevant to this research.

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<sup>85</sup> For an overview of Lefebvre's beyond Marxist notions of production, and the influence he takes from Nietzschean notions of creation see Elden (2004).

<sup>86</sup> Typically that of social space as found in sociological texts on territoriality whereby space is considered as a material realm that facilitates interaction between members of a community (see Hall and Gay, 1996).



Shields proposes that rather than creating a specific model of urban space, Lefebvre explored the contests over the meaning of space and considered how relations were infused with cultural meaning through everyday acts of production, firmly stating that:

Lefebvre attempted to establish the presence of a 'lived' spatialisation within the hegemonic 'logico-epistemological' theories of space promulgated by philosophy, geography and urban planning and the everyday attitude that ignored the spatial altogether.

(1999: 146)

In sum, Lefebvre emphasises that any attempt to grasp everyday life needs to begin with an understanding of the spatial, and that such a comprehension can only be developed by engaging with the reciprocal production of space and everyday life. As examined in the previous chapter, the dichotomous divide of space into 'public' and 'private' is one of the key ways in which historical and contemporary spatiality has been understood. How the divide is socially and spatially produced must therefore be carefully considered in relation to its everyday meaning, its 'lived' sense.

'Space' Lefebvre postulates, is a historical product, at once a medium and outcome of the social being. For Lefebvre, 'space' is neither a theatre, setting, nor container, but a social production, a 'concrete abstraction' - simultaneously mental and material, work and product. He claims that social relations have no real existence except in and through space, arguing that:

The social relations of production have a social existence to the extent that they have a spatial existence; they project themselves into a space, becoming inscribed there, and in the process producing the space itself. Failing this, these relations would remain in the realm of 'pure' abstraction - that is to say, in the realm of representations and hence ideology; the realm of verbalism, verbiage and empty words.

(Lefebvre, 1991: 129)

'Space' is permeated with social relations; social relations do not only support it, but it is also producing and produced by social relations (Hayden, 1997). All social relations become real and concrete, part of our lived existence, only when they are spatially inscribed - that is concretely represented in the social production of social space. This holds true for the artificial division set up between public and private space, as individuals attempt to carve up material and social worlds and live within the resultant frameworks.



The previous chapter argued that the socially constructed public/private divides structuring our everyday landscapes are diverse, but that they nonetheless exist as social realities. As Soja argues, social reality is not just coincidentally spatial, existing *in* space, but it is 'presuppositionally and ontologically spatial' (1996: 129). In Soja's reading of Lefebvre, he is arguing for an action-orientated and politicised ontology and epistemology for space claiming that 'everything' also occurs in space, 'not merely incidentally but as a vital part of the (social) production of (social) space, the construction of individual and societal spheres' (1996: 46). In relation to this thesis, the interplay between social and spatial processes in designating space as public (collective) or private (individual) is significant. There is, for Lefebvre (1991) (and his many followers, for example, Soja, 1996 and Borden, 2001), no unspatialised reality. This relationship between the spatial and the social - in Soja's terms the 'socio-spatial' dialectic (1996) - is an interactive one in which 'people make spaces and spaces make people' (Borden, 2001: 15). In order to understand how the spaces of the contemporary urban realm become 'public', we need to account for how they are being marked as 'public' and how they simultaneously create and/or allow for the display of 'publicness'. Alongside this, we need to consider how space is conceived and/or thought of as 'public'.

Lefebvre characterises the spatiality of Western capitalist societies since the end of the eighteenth century as abstract space, successfully identifying the domain of abstract space with the built environment, a set of social behaviours, an ensemble of cognitive relations, technical procedures and ideologically coded knowledge.<sup>87</sup> Within abstract space, difference is continually flattened and 'crushed' through the state as well as the economy (Dimenberg, 1998). Abstract spaces are arguably similar to the public spaces promoted within New Labour's urban renaissance agenda as they emphasise the 'commodification' of space and its concomitant subservience to 'property relations' and 'systematic surveillance and regulation by the state' (Gregory, 1993: 382). The concept of 'abstract space' offers valuable criteria for distinguishing between spatial realms

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<sup>87</sup> Like so much of this work, the notion of abstract space straddles conventional boundaries between philosophy, geography, social theory, architecture, urban planning, history and political economy.



conducive to a vital collective life, and pseudo-public spaces of consumption and distinction that merely feign social inclusion and frustrate the liberating human spatial practice that Lefebvre calls 'appropriation' (Purcell, 2003).

Abstract space realises 'the essential spatial contradiction of society' as the confrontation between 'the externalisation of economic and political processes originating with the Capitalist class *and* the state, and social space, or the space of use values produced by the complex interaction of all classes in the pursuit of everyday life' (Gottdiener, 1985: 127; Dimendberg, 1998). Following Mitchell (1995, 2003), it would seem that the contradictions inherent to abstract space provide the opportunity for oppositional groups to continually play a part in the production and reproduction of 'social space' (which he uses interchangeably with 'public space'). 'Space' is not an empty dimension along which social groupings become structured, but has to be considered in terms of its involvement in the constitution of systems of interaction (Ruddick, 1996). This is fundamentally important when considering how notions of 'public space' and 'the public' are (re)created. If 'space' is 'constituted through social relations and material social practices' (Massey, 1994: 254), then any understanding of the (re)creation of 'public space' must consider the social relations and material social practices structuring spaces as 'public'.

To capture the multiple mechanisms facilitating the creation and demarcation of space as 'public' - be it ideationally, symbolically, physically or instrumentally - a framework that can begin to account for the complexity of such a process is required. An approach that acknowledges the potentially manifold and contrasting ways in which space is designed, regulated, managed and used is needed to appreciate the dynamics involved in reproducing 'public space'. Lefebvre's 'unitary model' of spatial production is helpful when considering all of the elements involved in the production of space, something which he develops through the creation of a conceptual triad. This chapter proposes that Lefebvre's conceptual triad provides the basis for developing a critical spatial framework that can be used to investigate contemporary public space.



### 5.2.1: Lefebvre's conceptual triad

To understand space in all of its complexity, Lefebvre developed a concise conceptual triad that can be used to capture the generative process of space by considering the interrelation of the multiple elements involved in spatial production. However, Lefebvre's arguments are constructed in such a way that they are not readily summarised: 'his project is designed to elicit debate and engagement, and the metaphors and illustrations he uses are not reducible to a simple set of parameters' (McCann, 1999: 163). Nevertheless, Lefebvre sets out an initial conceptual plan for his work based on a triad to which he keeps 'returning over and over again' (1991: 33). As Elden discusses in his helpful guide to the Lefebvrian school of thought, *Understanding Henri Lefebvre*:

For Lefebvre, space needs to be understood not in two ways - as conceived, abstract thought, or perceived, concrete reality of space - but in three ways, with the additional space of space as *lived*, which resolves the conflicts between the previous two without being reducible to either. (2004: 187, emphasis in original)

Elden gives a concise yet effective appraisal of how space has 'long ceased to be a passive geographic or empty geometric milieu', arguing that it has instead become '*instrumental*' i.e. a realised abstraction; a mental and material construct (2004: 189). He proposes that it is the way in which space is considered as *instrumental* that provides us, through Lefebvre's conceptual triad, with a third realm between that of the conceived and the perceived, namely that of the lived. Elden discusses how Lefebvre had proposed that both human space and time lie within both everyday reality and philosophical abstraction. For Lefebvre, space and time, as they are socially lived and socially produced, are constructed of both physical and mental elements. It is from this insight that Lefebvre develops his conceptual triad of spatial practice (perceived space), representations of space (conceived space) and spaces of representation (lived space).

Lefebvre provides an overview of the key characteristics of each of the spatial realms as illustrated in Table 5.2.1. Elden, however, provides the most succinct summary of Lefebvre's conceptual triad, noting how Lefebvre sees space in three ways as perceived, conceived and lived (*l'espace perçu, conçu, vécu*):



This Lefebvrian schema sees a unity between physical, mental and social space. The first of these takes space as a physical form, *real* space, space that is generated and used. The second is the space of *savoir* (knowledge) and logic of maps, mathematics of space as the instrumental space of engineers and urban planners, of navigators and explorers. Space as a mental construct, *imagined* space. The third sees space as produced and modified over time and through its use, spaces invested with symbolism and meaning, the space of *connaissance* (less formal or more local forms of knowledge), space as *real-and-imagined*. (Elden, 2004: 190)

Spatial practice, representations of space and spaces of representation necessarily incorporate each other in their concrete historical-geographical combinations; any understanding of space must account not only for each separately, but above all, for their interrelations and linkages with social practice. Everyday space and spatiality are always constructed through some spatially and historically specific configuration of the three and this is nowhere more important than in the way in which space has been (re)produced as public and/or private (Borden et al., 2001). For this reason when examining the empirical sites involved in this research, each of the three elements of 'space' will be considered to provide the basis for the 'loose framework' needed to understand how that space is produced.

**Table 5.2.1: Lefebvre's conceptual triad:**

1. *Spatial Practice*, which embraces production and reproduction, and the particular locations and spatial sets characteristic of each social formation. Spatial practice ensures continuity and some degree of cohesion. In terms of social space, and of each member of a given society's relationship to that space, this cohesion implies a guaranteed level of *competence* and a specific level of *performance*.
2. *Representations of Space*, which are tied to the relations of production and to the 'order' which those relations impose, and hence to knowledge, to signs, to codes, and to 'frontal' relations.
3. *Spaces of Representation*, embodying complex symbolisms, sometimes coded, sometimes not, linked to the clandestine or underground side of social life, as also to art (which may come eventually to be defined less as a code of space than as a code of spaces of representation).

(Lefebvre, 1991: 33)

Lefebvre's discussion of the social production of space is informed by the



material circumstances of everyday life. As exemplified by McCann's (1999) utilisation of Lefebvre's theoretical framework to discuss racial exclusion in the public spaces of US cities (most specifically Lexington), Lefebvre's constant attention to everyday practices, including its temporality and position within historical processes, make his work highly relevant to discussions of how urban public spaces are constantly (re)produced. Lefebvre (1991) claims that in itself, the conceived-perceived-lived triad does not explain anything about contemporary spatiality, stating that it is essentially a hollow abstract device that has to be employed in concrete situations. He uses his historical model throughout *The Production of Space* to illustrate its potential in grasping the everyday life of specific areas over time. BALTIC and the Centre for LIFE are exactly the types of 'concrete' spaces through which Lefebvre's abstract and hollow device can be enlivened. The empirical chapters of the thesis hope to illustrate how the conceptual triad facilitates a deeper engagement with these spaces to unravel how such spaces are produced as 'public' (or private).

It is Lefebvre's ability to link representation and imagination with the physical spaces of cities and to emphasise the dialectical relationship between everyday practice and urban space, including the many actors and interest groups involved, that makes his work so attractive and relevant to this research. In sum, Lefebvre's work provides a conceptual triad through which the spatial practices of everyday life can be understood as central to the production and maintenance of the notion and reality of public space. The conceptual triad incorporates the design, use, regulation and management mechanisms orchestrating the everyday spaces of the city, therefore providing a sound theoretical basis for this thesis. However, Lefebvre was writing about the production of space over 30 years ago, so it is important to chart how others have developed his ideas in attempting to theorise spatial production in the contemporary city.

Soja engages explicitly with Lefebvre's conceptual triad to develop the notion of 'Thirdspace' in understanding contemporary urban space:

Thirdspace can be described as a creative recombination and extension, one that builds on a Firstspace perspective that is focused



on the 'real' material world and a Secondspace perspective that interprets this reality through 'imagined' representations of spatiality.  
(1996: 6)

Soja argues that it is only within the Thirdspace that the true complexity of space can be considered. He portrays it as the space where 'everything comes together': subjectivity and objectivity, the abstract and the concrete, the real and the imagined, the unknowable and the unimaginable, the repetitive and the differential, structure and agency, mind and body, consciousness and unconsciousness, the disciplined and the transdisciplinary, everyday life and unending history (Soja, 1996: 6-7).

Both Soja's Thirdspace and its theoretical ancestor, Lefebvre's encompassing notion of social space, are comprised of all three spatialities - perceived, conceived and lived - with no one inherently privileged *a priori*. In fact, Soja argues in a style reminiscent of Lefebvre that: 'All excursions into Thirdspace begin with an ontological restructuring, with the presupposition that being-in-the-world, is existentially definable as being simultaneously historical, social and spatial' (Soja, 1996: 73). Just like Lefebvre's notion of spaces of representation or lived space, Thirdspace is practiced and lived, rather than simply being material (conceived) or mental (perceived). This focus on the lived world provides the theoretical groundwork for thinking about a politics of space based on space as lived, practiced and inhabited space - in sum, spaces like those of the contemporary urban realms that this thesis aims to explore (Cresswell and Verstraete, 2002).

### 5.2.2: Towards a socio-spatialisation of space

Lefebvre's *magnum opus* has undoubtedly influenced how space is considered since more and more academics have been using the term 'socio-spatialisation' to describe why conceptualisations of space should account for the mental, lived and material dimensions of space (Allen and Pryke, 1994; Borden, 2003; Low and Smith, 2006; Shields, 1991; Soja, 1996; Ruddick, 1996).<sup>88</sup> While some scholars use the term very loosely, without ever clarifying what they mean

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<sup>88</sup> Lefebvre's concern with power, and specifically production, has obvious Marxist overtones in comparison to these other accounts of public space.



by it, Shields provides a concise definition: 'The term socio-spatialisation is used to designate the social construction of the spatial which is a formation of both discursive and non-discursive elements, practices and processes' (1999: 7). Hinting at the complexity of what socio-spatialisation means, Shields goes on to develop this model of spatial production. Acknowledging that he is indebted to Lefebvre and Foucault, Shields passionately argues that understandings and concepts of space cannot be divorced from the real fabric of how people live their everyday lives.

Shields highlights the changes in meaning which have been created through the translation of *The Production of Space* into English in 1991. He proposes that because Lefebvre is referring to not only the empirical disposition of things in the landscape as 'space' (the physical aspect), but also to the attitude and habitual practices at work in and across space, his metaphoric '*l'espace*' might be better understood as the '*spatialisation* of social order' (Shields, 1999: 154, emphasis in original).<sup>89</sup> This sense of spatialisation captures the processual nature of *l'espace* that Lefebvre insists is a matter of ongoing activities where concrete and non-discursive practices are both informed by and go on to provoke modifications of the cultural discourse of the spatial. Space is constantly being (re)produced and (re)negotiated, it is never static, its meaning never entirely stable. This is highly relevant when considering how the designation of space as 'public' and/or 'private' is an ongoing process within the contemporary realm, linking closely to some of the key debates in the previous chapter. The philosophical debates about the public/private dichotomy must be brought into conversation with current debates within critical spatial theory if a more comprehensive understanding of public space is to be produced.

The previous chapter discussed how the dominant discourses and repetitive practices of hegemonic groups produce space as 'public' and/or 'private'. Descriptive and prescriptive notions of the public/private divide were argued to be demonstrations of power in space. For Foucault (1977), space can no longer be treated as 'the dead, the fixed and the undialectic, the immobile'; it is

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<sup>89</sup> *L'espace* in French has a broader range of meanings than the English 'space'. Area, zoning, spacing and even place sometimes capture the French term better than 'space'.



to be understood as intricately operative in the constructions of social power and knowledge (Balshaw and Kennedy, 2000: 2). Shields (1999), following Foucault (1977), argues that the administrative, guiding nature of discursive understandings of space are central to the transformation of purely discursive (i.e. ideational, symbolic, and linguistic) notions of space, and of the 'imaginary geographies' (Said, 1989), into empirically-specifiable everyday actions of people, of the crowd-practices and emotional community of affective groups, of institutional policies and political-economic arrangements. Such insights bear strong relation to the claims of Chapter Two, whereby the kinds of public space promoted in public policy were discussed as being highly related to the types of public space developed within our towns and cities.

Shields proposes that: 'The overarching order of space, is reproduced in concrete forms and re-affirms as well as reproduces 'discourses of space' which constitute it' (1999: 7). He highlights how difficult it can be to change how space is understood, and hence how it is used, due to the power of the dominant discourses running throughout space. Therefore, whilst it may be a small step theoretically to imagine the designation of space as 'public' and/or 'private' as different to how they are currently considered, in practice it could be more challenging. The empirical chapters of the thesis explore this, by highlighting how difficult it is to consider the case study sites as private as opposed to public spaces, despite some of the exclusionary mechanisms operating within them. Nevertheless, such insights into the prevailing power of dominant discourses on public space highlight how, despite their overall authority, in order to stay dominant such discourses must re-inscribe themselves both socially and spatially in order to re-ify themselves as normative.

In order to understand the relevance of this in relation to the construction of space as 'public', Gur (2002) provides some instructive insights. Gur (2002) claims that spatialisation is inherently political by asserting that it is both a cause and effect of power relations. He persuasively argues that: 'Spatialisation as a term puts space at the centre of arguments on dialectical



relations between power, knowledge, discourse and representation and inserts space into social thought and imagination' (Gur, 2002: 237).<sup>90</sup> He contends that in doing so, it helps us to explain the manner in which social and spatial relations are mutually inclusive and constitutive of one another, and how society and space are simultaneously realised by thinking, experiencing and making social actors. If, as Gur proposes, this process of spatialisation connects mental and material space with spatial metaphors and symbols or categorisations of the social, then the consequences of this intertwining for constructions of 'public' must be examined carefully.

Gur (2002) and Shields (1999) highlight the potential of the social-spatialisation theorisations of space in understanding how certain models of public space, and specific actions and behaviours of the public, are classed as acceptable or appropriate. The spatial is more than the historically and spatially specific ontological arrangement through which we live our lives. By paying attention to the specific technologies of manipulation and formulation of everyday spatial notions (in the case of this thesis the designation of space as public or private), we can build a base, in theory, from which to criticise the arrangements and to imagine other arrangements, or other worlds, and even different experiences of the lived body. This will be explored in the empirical chapters of the thesis in relation to how notions of public/private are recreated and challenged in the everyday city by its users.

### **5.3: Producing space and making place: The role of power relations in the creation of normative landscapes<sup>91</sup>**

It is possible to see how the principle that '(social) space is a (social) product' (Lefebvre, 1991) can lead to the understanding that space, thus produced, also serves as a tool of thought and action; that in addition to being a means of production it is also a means of control, and hence, of domination, of power

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<sup>90</sup> Dialectics is both a statement about what the world is and a method of organising this world for the purpose of study and presentation (Ollman, 1990 cited in Merrifield, 1993: 517).

<sup>91</sup> There is substantial literature debating the difference between 'space' and 'place', and whilst this is not a central concern of the thesis, it is important to acknowledge this. For an overview, see Agnew (1987), Entrikin (1991) and Tuan (1977).



(Gramsci et al., 1971). Space is a resource in the structuration of power. Recognising that people have a capacity to change their environment and, more generally, that individuals retain some autonomy as thinking and acting agents, leads to the question of the distribution of power within social systems, and of spatial structures as embodiments of power relations (Sibley, 1995). Amin and Thrift illustrate how 'space and power are intimately interconnected' (2002: 12). Following Van Paassen (1976), they propose that the so-called 'spatial order' is in fact a societal order, which can be interpreted only as a social product resulting from the complex interplay of human perceptions, objectives and capacities, institutional rules and material conditions connected with human and physical material substances. Following Amin and Thrift (2002), it would seem that the public/private divide is a societal order that is socially produced and constructed by powerful actors.

Lefebvre's notion of the '(social) production of (social) space' incorporates both the social production and social construction of space. Low (1996) argues that these two terms are used interchangeably, but do in fact have distinct if related meanings. On the one hand:

The social production of space includes all those factors – social, economic, ideological, and technological – the intended goal of which is the physical creation of the setting. The materialist emphasis of the term social production is useful in defining the historical emergence and political and economic formation of urban space.  
(Low, 1996: 861)

On the other hand:

The term social construction may then be conveniently reserved for the phenomenological and symbolic experience of space as mediated by processes such as exchange, conflict and control.  
(Low, 1996: 862)

By combining the material and physical elements of social production and the symbolic and lived elements of social construction, Lefebvre's conceptual triad facilitates a deeper engagement with everyday public space. Lefebvre's conceptual triad encompasses some of the more social or lived aspects of space that are often associated with the term 'place' (see Casey, 1997). The social and spatial dichotomy of 'public' and 'private' is part of everyday lived



experience, a way of understanding the urban realm and a way of (re)producing the socio-spatial landscape. Ignoring this duality (real physical space and socially constructed publicness or privacy) dooms any definition of public space to insufficiency. In fact, it is through spatial forms that the public/private divide inevitably takes its shape.

A spatial code such as the public/private divide is not simply a means of reading or interpreting space; rather it is a means of 'living a space, of understanding it, and producing it' (Cresswell and Verstraete, 2002: 47). In the contemporary city, the forces to create boundaries and separate spatial realms by (re)producing specific typologies of space have been used in order to diffuse conflict in the city. Malone (2000) has suggested that the categorisation of space as 'public' or 'private' has focused on regulating and maintaining shared value systems, which are based on a vision of appropriate use and appropriate users of space. As discussed in Chapter Two in relation to urban design practices, efforts are made to control incursions and the behaviour of groups not seen to 'belong' in public spaces.

While concepts of public space are supposed to capture certain principles of equality and inclusion, the real life of public spaces shows how social distinctions work through spatial exclusions (Tonkiss, 2005). The human landscape can be read as a landscape of exclusion as dominant groups express power in the monopolisation of space, and weaker groups in society are relegated to less desirable spatial locations and environments (Sibley, 1995). Staeheli argues that it is impossible to envision a space in which people interact without both 'exclusion and access as part of its social structure' (1996: 123). The degrading, disappearance and policing of public space does not simply question what such spaces are for, but also what the public itself might mean and whom it might include. In this sense, the prohibitions that operate in public space mark the limits of everyday spatial citizenship.

To get beyond the myths that secure capitalist hegemony (as discussed in the previous chapter), to expose the oppressive practices, it is necessary to



examine the assumptions about inclusion and exclusion which are implicit within public spaces through the dominant ideologies operating within them (Sibley, 1995). Ideological beliefs are important because they affect what people do. Space is produced by practice that adheres to (ideological) beliefs about what is the appropriate thing to do within a given area. The repetition and regulation of behaviours engineered through an adherence to what is considered appropriate, sees the space in which they are practiced reproducing the beliefs that produce it in a way that makes them appear natural, self-evident and common sense (Cresswell, 1996). Thus, spaces are active forces in the reproduction of norms - the definition of appropriate practice.

### **5.3.1: Spatialising commonsense**

Bourdieu (1989) argues that an established order, if it is successful, must make its world seem to be the natural world - the 'commonsense world'. Commonsense can be seen as a 'puissant form of power relations' because certain relations are 'obvious and often unquestioned' (Cresswell, 1996: 19; Nairn, 2003). Thus, the power relations producing public space may not be imposed, but rather (re)formed through the interactions between people and space, they may be consensual:

Commonsense...produces the strongest adherence to an established order. People act as they think they are supposed to; they do what they think is appropriate in places that are also appropriate...When individuals and groups ignore this socially produced commonsense they are said to be 'out of place' and defined as deviant. (Cresswell, 1997: 360)

The labelling of actions as inappropriate in the context of a particular setting, in this case public space, serves as evidence for the always already existing normative geography (Cresswell, 1996). By acting in a particular way, the user of a public space is inserted into a particular relation with the ideology regulating and maintaining the identity of that space. For this reason, spatial practices occurring in space have to be mindful of the dominant conceived spatial practices operating over that space (Merrifield, 1993). This will be more carefully explored in the empirical chapters of this thesis, in the case of BALTIC in relation to 'gallery-going' practices, and in the case of the Pink Triangle in



relation to displays of non-heterosexual sexuality.

Dominant conceptions of space can operate in overt and/or subtle ways, depending on the types of behaviour and/or activities they are trying to encourage (Iveson, 2007). As noted by Bourdieu: 'Physical barriers and locks provide the most obvious controls on the use of space, but an individual's behaviour is also constrained by what they think is appropriate, admissible and/or possible' (1977: 2). Commonsense thus enables some actions (and embodiments) to be taken for granted and invisible whilst rendering others visible and 'out of place'. Consequently, there will be enactments/bodies that do not require explanations or justifications and, in passing unnoticed, (re)form the hegemony of that space in contrast to those that are commented on, observed and visible.

Foucault's (1977) explication of self-discipline and self-surveillance enables an understanding of the adherence to the established orders (as will be more fully discussed in Chapter Six in relation to the self-policing of sexuality). Specifically, individuals adhere to particular norms for fear of the consequences of transgressing these codes despite not knowing if they are actually being surveilled at that moment (Foucault, 1977). Thus, self-control and interactive surveillance often perpetuates existing regulations, (re)creating actions, embodiments and individuals as in/out of place (Sibley, 1995; Cresswell, 1996, 1997). How users police their behaviour according to whether they perceive the space they are in to be 'public'/'private' is significant and will be critically explored in the empirical chapters of the thesis.

Who is felt to belong and not belong contributes in an important way to the shaping of public space (Sibley, 1995). Following Sibley (1995), it would seem that the sense of border between self and other is echoed in both social and spatial boundaries, especially the boundaries of 'public' and 'private'. Hegemonic power wielded by those in positions of authority does not merely manipulate naively given differences between individuals and social groups, it actively produces and reproduces difference as a key strategy to create and



maintain modes of social and spatial division that are advantageous to its continued empowerment and authority (Soja, 1996). For example, there is a connection between the function and design of public space as determined by commercial interests and design professionals, architects, planners and the construction of groups of the population as 'deviant', out of place, and threatening to the projected image of the development (see Chapter Two).

A key contribution of critical theorisations of the public/private distinction has been to demonstrate how the liberal rhetoric of 'publicness' actually reinscribes particular forms of subordination and exclusion. The previous chapter discussed this in relation to its affects on what the term 'public' means, and this chapter begins to unpack its implications for the spatiality of public i.e. public space. This liberal model masks the fact that, in various times and spaces, some groups seem to have been relatively (if not completely) successful in defining their norms as universal, thus 'making a public look like *the* public' (Iveson, 2000: 261, emphasis in original). This has far-reaching consequences for how dominant groups control access to, and behaviour in, public space. The consequences can be exemplified in the restrictions placed upon non-heterosexual groups in the contemporary urban realm.

### **5.3.2: Public space and the naturalisation of heterosexuality**

Hubbard and Sanders argue that:

Recent studies of sexuality and space have demonstrated that public spaces are constructed around particular notions of appropriate sexual comportment which excludes those whose lives do not centre on monogamous, heterosexual, pro-creative sex. (2003: 51)

Whilst a great number of sexual practices fall into this category - e.g. sex with contraception, prostitution, group sex and underage sex – a particular focus for this thesis is how public space is structured around notions of a supposedly 'natural' heterosexuality.

Valentine (1995) proposes that such is the strength of the assumption of the 'naturalness' of heterosexual hegemony that most people are oblivious to the way it operates as a process of power relations in all spaces. According to



Richardson (1996), this is because, through the regular repetition of heterosexual practices in space (such as heterosexual couples holding hands, kissing, linking arms and displaying subtle signs of affection), heterosexuality has been constructed as a natural, fixed and stable category whose broader appeal has become falsely paraded as universal and monolithic. The centrality of space to such a configuration is obvious as the perceived normality of heterosexual ways of being is maintained through regulatory regimes that control people's uses and manipulations of space (Elder, 1998). The way in which heterosexuality has been mistakenly understood as something which holds universal appeal, has led to discrimination and prejudice being displayed towards those who do not ascribe to this public ideal, especially in the public spaces of the city.

Heterosexuality has become normalised through the institutionalisation of sexual coding as national policy agendas often favour 'heterosexual families'; commercial ventures promote the building of homes that envision the 'nuclear family' as the ideal inhabitants; and employers provide employee rights which favour 'heterosexual couples'. Many of the 'queer' users of the Pink Triangle commented on their subordination within (heterosexual) society, claiming: 'To be gay is to be a second class citizen and face challenges that heterosexual couples wont even be aware of' (Tracey, pers. comm., 2005); 'They [heterosexuals] can just take the passing of their sexuality unnoticed for granted, well it's just normal isn't it' (Brian, pers. comm., 2005); 'I just wish that we [respondent and their same sex partner] could be like normal het[erosexual] couples, I mean we're not trying to make a big deal about being gay' (Lee, pers. comm., 2005). Several of the 'queer' respondents involved in this research believed that due to their deviation from heterosexuality, their sexual behaviour was nearly always noted if displayed in public, be it through disapproving, shocked or curious looks, or verbal comments, insults or questioning. The extent to which such reactions controlled an individual's behaviour in public space will be discussed in Chapter Six.

There is an extensive literature available examining how sexuality is controlled



in public space (see, Aldrich, 2003; Califa, 1994; Collins and Cameron, 2001; Hubbard, 2001, 2003, 2006; Valentine, 1995; and Warner, 2001). This thesis argues that sexuality is not only controlled *in* public space, but also *through* public space. As highlighted by Iveson:

Some have considered the ways in which certain kinds of behaviour and interaction are normalised through public space, with exclusionary consequences for those whose very presence, behaviour or identities are characterised as 'abnormal' and problematised as 'deviant'.  
(2003: 260)

It is by carefully examining the multiple - explicit and implicit - ways that sexuality, specifically 'non-heterosexual sexuality', is controlled in, through, and across space that the way in which certain types of sexuality, associated with the targeted users of the 'scene' in Newcastle, have come to be considered as 'deviant' and 'abnormal'.

Therborn argues that the operation of ideology in human life 'basically involves the constitution and patterning of how human beings live their lives as conscious, reflecting initiators of acts in a structured and meaningful world' (1991: 10). Sexuality is incorporated into how space is ideologically constituted and patterned, and the standards of acceptability against which it is judged are often based around the public/private divide. As proposed by Foucault (1997), sexuality is discursive, material and inseparable from the exercise of power and the associated production of knowledge and space.

Within the public spaces of contemporary Western cities, heterosexuality is such a dominant social relation and so taken for granted that, in many ways, it appears to be paradoxically asexual. It is 'de-sexualised' because of the socially constructed morally pure ground on which it supposedly stands. In this research the reverse also holds true: non-normative ways of being are excluded in and through everyday spaces as heterosexuality is implicitly understood as the 'normal' and non-normative sexuality as subsequently 'abnormal' and deviant. According to Weeks, the power of the ideology behind this means that the 'queer behaviour has to be explained as a deviation from the norm of sexual behaviour' (1996: 13). This deviation receives increased attention due to its



perceived overtly sexual nature, which is deemed as 'inappropriate' in public space.

As argued earlier, the labelling of actions as 'inappropriate' in the context of a particular space serves as evidence for the already existing normative geography that more often than not passes unrecognised in a taken-for-granted fashion (Cresswell, 1996). However, space is duplicitous in that it cannot be reduced to the concrete and merely ideological; rather it displays an uneasy tension between them, allowing room for creative practices that question the norms that are seemingly upholding the space. The opportunities provided by space to challenge existing norms deserves attention. Such affordances need to be understood in relation to the development of alternative spatial realms, which are ordinarily prefigured precisely around the non-normative ways of being that are excluded from everyday public space. Subordinate groups do not only use public spaces of the city to protest against their misfortunes, some even form alternative public spaces.

Spatial exclusions have created a demand for alternative public and private spaces, where non-normative sexual citizens feel more relaxed and able to develop and display their sexuality. This demand is significant due to the lack of provision of such opportunities in the day-to-day public spaces of the city. However, the creation of such developments is not always easy, as those who have the greatest power over spaces have both the greatest power of access (publicness) and the greatest power of exclusion (privacy). This inevitably has repercussions for individuals' abilities to make their claim to both public and private space. Lefebvre makes the point when he argues that to have any power or ability to contest domination, minorities (in his case social movements) must have spaces in which they have both the right to privacy and the right of publicness (Light and Smith, 1998). This requires the ability to have access to and challenge the dominant discourse, but in terms of a self-defined alternative. This has contributed to the development of so called 'gay villages' or 'gay enclaves', something which will be discussed extensively in Chapter Six in relation to Newcastle's gay village.



#### 5.4: Public space: The realm of contestation, renegotiation and conflicting ideologies

As Chapter Two argued, categories like 'the public' can only be constructed as fundamentally coherent by 'disavowing the conflicts, particularity and uncertainty that constitute social life' (Deutsche, 2002: 259). This holds resonance with how we can come to understand notions of public space. Public space is not pre-given, in either form or meaning, nor is it a homogenous entity; rather, it is produced through ongoing contestation and (re)negotiation: 'Public spaces differ depending on the meanings, contested and negotiated though they are, the different publics bring to them' (Deutsche, 2002: 360). Hillier argues that 'there are indeed multiple meanings of spaces held by different social groups and the question of which identity is dominant will be the result of social negotiation and conflict' (1998: 208). We must not forget the agency of individuals that can be used to challenge dominant discourses about public space. As argued by Borden et al. (2000), it is struggle, not just the domineering actions of the powerful, that shapes public space.

As Elden notes, spatial language is often inflected with notions of contestation, struggle and productivity, 'precisely because it mirrors the actual uses and experiences of space' (2004: 186). Elden states that:

Lefebvre argues that space is the ultimate locus and medium of struggle and it is therefore a crucial political issue. As he aphorises, 'there is a politics of space because space is political' (1976). Space is not just the place of conflict, but an object of struggle itself. There is therefore work to be done on an understanding of space and how it is socially constructed and used. (2004: 194)

Different forms of social construction are central to the production of space - principally in terms of class, but also in terms of gender, ethnicity, sexuality, family relations and age (Lefebvre, 1991; Mitchell, 2003). Abstract space tends to erase these characteristics; therefore, attempts to change the status quo must be directed towards restoring them.

Many geographers have looked at how social power is produced and reinforced spatially and, more recently, some have addressed the numerous means by



which uneven power relations are contested and resisted. In various ways, this work examines how hegemony is spatially secured - and thus 'might be interrupted, compromised and undone on spatial as well as social and political grounds' (Katz, 2002: 260). Ultimately, if people are not simply marginalized *in* space, but also *through* space, it is also *through* space that they attempt to challenge this process of domination and construct different identities for themselves (Ruddick, 1996). Spaces are not merely locations in which politics takes place, but frequently are objects of struggles in their own right. Urban spaces provide sites for political action and are themselves 'politicised in contests over access, control and representation' (Tonkiss, 2005: 59). As Lefebvre states, the city constitutes not only the 'setting', but also the 'stakes' of political contestation (1991: 386, 1996). Power is 'made visible' in the city through struggles both in and over space (Tonkiss, 2005: 61).

Writing directly after the famous revolts of 1968 in Paris, Lefebvre notes that it is in the public space of the streets and squares (the paradigmatic public spaces of cities) that counter-cultural activities most readily take place. He argued that these are arenas not yet dominated by the state or commercial developers: 'It was in the space of the streets that spontaneity expressed itself – in an area of society not occupied by institutions...social space has assumed new meaning' (1969: 71-72). Combining the real and imagined, things and thought on equal terms, or at least not privileging one over the other *a priori*, these lived spaces of representation, are apparently the terrain for the generation of 'counterspaces', space of resistance to the dominant order arising precisely from their subordinate, peripheral or marginalized position (Soja, 1996). These are the spaces in which the 'right to the city' can be either enacted or, at least, fought for – spaces Lefebvre calls 'differential'.

The 'differential' spaces in which 'abstract space' may be challenged can be different only if they have the power to exclude the dominant representations of space. However, whereas the challenge to dominance may originate on the margins, it must enter the mainstream (on its own terms) to be effective. Soja claims that the assertion of an alternative envisioning of spatiality directly



challenges all conventional modes of spatial thinking, stating that:

They are not just 'other spaces' to be added to the geographical imagination, they are also 'other than' the established ways of thinking spatially. They are meant to detonate, to deconstruct, not to be comfortably poured back into old containers. (1996: 163)

This will be further discussed in Chapter Six in relation to the notion of a 'counterpublic', a term commonly used to theorise counter-cultural spaces that stand outside the practices of normative public space. For now, it is important to note that individuals and groups have produced new forms of spatiality to claim their right to the city (see Purcell, 2003), recreating the city as *oeuvre* - a work in which its citizens participate - in new and interesting ways.

Numerous academics chart the resistance that minority groups such as minority ethnic (Merrifield, 2000), queer (Bell, 1999; Binnie, 2000; Browne, 2006) and youth (Valentine, 1999) users of public space have levelled at the socially normative productions and constructions of the space that have ostracized them from these areas. As Soja highlights:

Class struggle as well as other struggles are increasingly contained and defined in their spatiality and trapped in its 'grid'. Social struggles must then become a consciously and politically spatial struggle to regain control over the spatial production of this 'space'. (1996: 68)

Soja's argument is heavily influenced by Lefebvre's declaration that any marginal user of public space cannot avoid a 'trial by space' through attempts to make their claim for the 'right to the city' (1991). For Lefebvre and his followers, there is a spatial arena in which resistance can be launched and it is public space that provides the most obvious platform.

People's active appropriation of public space, and their willingness to overcome or ignore physical or social constraints, are well captured by the evocative verbs researchers use to describe activities that create looseness in public space. For example, Borden (2001) describes how skateboarders adopt, take over, colonise, emulate, repeat, work within, work against, re-imagine, re-temporalise, reject, edit and recompose the spaces of the city. Extending the example of skateboarding, Borden highlights that pre-existing uses of space are not the



only possible ones, and that architecture or material landscapes can instead be 'productive of things, and consumed by activities', which are not explicitly commodified (2001: 247). Borden et al. engage with Lefebvre's work to remind us that he had argued that 'use value, subordinated for centuries to exchange value, can now come first again' (2001: 17). Lefebvre's triad of the production of urban space has become influential because of its inclusion of the power of agency as a counter-force to the successive ways in which capitalist development has sought to forge city spaces in its interests. Citizens of the city were reinstated with the power to 'use' the city in ways other than becoming involved in the commercial 'exchange' provided by the proliferating commodified landscapes.

Whilst the liberatory potential of public space is championed by many (Borden, 2003; Franck and Stevens, 2007; Lees, 2000), it has also been argued that despite the 'publicness' of public space, the right to pursue activities other than those which are acceptable, expected and predetermined is by no means guaranteed; it is often hard won (Tonkiss, 2005). Lefebvre is not an idealist, and he insists that the resistance and contribution of material nature inevitably determines space, albeit never without considerable social or cultural mediation (Soja, 1996).<sup>92</sup> In their sophisticated reading of Lefebvre, Cresswell and Verstraete argue:

The pre-existence of space conditions the subject's presence, action and discourse, his competence and performance; yet the subject's presence, action and discourses at the same time as they presuppose this space, also negate it. (2002: 68)

The architecture and spaces of the modern city are not wholly constraining for there is a contradiction between the homogenising reduction of space by business, and the open differentiation of urban space in the city as a whole (Lefebvre, 1991). As the material realisation of ideology, material spaces expose the 'contradictions in space' that necessarily precede the formation of alternatives.

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<sup>92</sup> See Chapter Eight for a discussion of the importance of acknowledging the material and immaterial elements (re)producing public space in the contemporary urban realm.



Many urban geographers (Lees, 2000; Mitchell, 2001; Ruddick, 1996) have argued this point, but Borden (2001) gives real energy to the belief in the ability of marginal groups to challenge hegemonic norms of space at the level of the perceived, conceived and especially the lived. Rather than adopting the notion of public space as a potential arena for consensus and rationality (as discussed in the previous chapter through the work of Habermas), it may be more useful to imagine public space as 'constituted by difference and thereby inherently unstable and fluid' (Bridge and Watson, 2003: 374). As hooks (1991) argues, the ground we stand on is shifting, fragile and unstable. The processes, practices and negotiations at work in, through, and across space (re)produce that space, to the extent that it refuses to be adequately conceptualised as a static entity. The role of human agency in the (re)production of space cannot be disregarded; however, neither should the role of the materiality of space in the creation of specific environments, behaviours and regulations.

Amin and Thrift argue that spaces should be understood as 'everyday processes mobilized by flesh and stone interaction' (2002: 3). A key advantage of Lefebvre's conceptual triad is that it allows for an investigation into the 'flesh and stone' interactions that take place within the lived spaces of the city, precisely the kind of lived spaces that this thesis sets out to explore empirically. Space is often in high demand, but spatial conditions are fluid in the sense that they change over time: rules, roles and boundaries (such as the public/private distinction) continue to shift according to balances of power with changing spatial needs and alliances. The empirical chapters of the thesis will illustrate how the everyday implications of such dynamism result in making any systematic division between public/private inherently complicated.

Graham and Marvin (2001) cite the work of Norris and Armstrong (1991) to discuss how cities have always been contested spaces within which dominant power holders try to stipulate 'normative' ecologies of who 'belongs' (and who does not) where and when within the urban fabric. As stated by Lefebvre: 'Every social space is the outcome of a process with many aspects and many contributing currents' (1991: 110). Just what public space is and who has the



right to it, is rarely clear and certainly 'cannot be established in the abstract' (Mitchell, 2003: 5). Public space is the product of 'competing ideologies' about what constitutes that space (Mitchell, 2003: 129). Public space is increasingly commodified, but is always in a process of being shaped, reshaped and challenged by the spatial practices of various groups and individuals whose identities and actions 'undermine the homogeneity of contemporary cities' (McCann, 1999: 168).

As Goss (1996) emphasises, public space is always there for the making: it is always a site of control and contestation. Low and Smith have edited an entire book with the 'central message' that 'whatever the deadening weight of heightened repression and control over public space, spontaneous and organised political response always carries within it the capability of remaking and retaking public space and the public sphere' (2006: 16). Ultimately, the sheer diversity of users and their associated perceptions, experiences and uses of public space draws the notion of 'the public' into question. Public spaces may well come into being where places represent multiple and incongruent meanings (Hajer and Reijndorp, 2001: 68). Conflict is not something that befalls on originally or potentially harmonious urban public space. Urban public space is the product, site and generator of conflict.

The everyday spaces of the city are sites for a micro politics of urban life in which individuals exercise their spatial rights while negotiating the spatial claims of others. This is a politics of space as much lived in the body as it is written in law. The ways in which bodies are policed in public space, moreover, demonstrate the partial character of different people's rights to the city. Following Tonkiss, it would appear that conflicts at different scales over the meaning and use of 'public space' in the city 'trace a line from the 'ordinary' experience of urban individuals to wider conceptions of social inclusion and urban order' (2005: 37). The following empirical chapters hope to draw on the everyday experience of multiple stakeholders of public space in the contemporary city to investigate these conflicts and their impacts upon the (re)production of space in urban areas.



As argued by Cresswell and Verstratete: 'Spaces are never complete, finished, or bounded, but are always in process - becoming' (2002: 25). Ontologically it might be appropriate to assert that the identity of a space is not permanent, stable and bounded, however, spaces are often not experienced as fluid, unstable and open in practice. Spaces may be socially constructed, but the expectations they sustain are not always 'easily changed or rejected in practice' (Iveson, 2000: 61). Nevertheless, it is essential at this point to highlight two of the main ways in which the norms of hegemonic groups are challenged (and in fact illuminated) in and through public space. It is by continuing with the example of sexuality in space that this chapter briefly introduces the processes of 'resistance' and 'transgression', both of which are commonly used in public space to challenge the ideologies underpinning the day-to-day activities of space.

#### **5.4.1: Transgression and Resistance: Challenging (hetero)normative dimensions of public space through human agency and performance**

Cresswell (1996) highlights the key differences between transgression and resistance as forms of escaping and/or challenging the heteronormativity permeating contemporary urban public space. Transgression is portrayed as a politically motivated, transformative process, which aims to undermine the existing values imbued in space for a limited time. For example, the sensationalist tactics adopted by politically radical groups such as Queer Nation (Warner, 1993) and ACT UP (Geltmaker, 1992) who, amongst other things, hold kiss-ins in 'straight bars' to draw overt attention to the fragility of the heteronormativity of space, creating 'crisis-points' in the everyday lives of those privileged by hegemonic social (in this case sexual) norms. In comparison, resistance is viewed as being more assimilationist, increasingly answerable to power, in that it provides a space for sexual dissidents to escape the social norms enforced by heteronormativity, but it does not aim to directly challenge such hegemonic power.

Whether the Pink Triangle leans towards the latter characterisation will be more fully discussed in Chapter Six, the key point to make at this stage is that human



agency is harnessed and deployed in numerous ways to challenge existing models of socio-spatial dominance (re)producing contemporary public space. This is reminiscent of the work of De Certeau who, like Lefebvre, posits the reality of a dynamic, fluid, almost unknowable city against the ordered, legible representation of it. De Certeau (1984) delineates two ways of analysing power in the everyday spaces of the city, namely 'tactics' and 'strategies'. Hubbard and Sanders provide a succinct definition of what these terms mean in their insightful study of street prostitution, stating:

The latter is deemed to refer to the ordering and disciplining processes that make the distinctions between normal and deviant, while the former refers to the embodied actions of those who seek to escape these processes, using space in their own ends. (2003: 77)

Hubbard and Sanders illuminate De Certeau's key point in relation to space, notably that in everyday urban public spaces, the weak can use 'stubborn procedures that undermine strategies of the strong' (1984: xi).

Just like Lefebvre's 'spaces of representation', De Certeau's 'tactics' open up the opportunity for the processual and contestatory nature of public space to be manipulated. Whilst the success of 'strategies' depends upon creating a sense of the 'proper', which is 'a victory of space over time', the accomplishments of 'tactics' are less durable:

On the contrary, because it does not have a place [read space], a tactic depends on time – it is always on the watch for opportunities that must be seized on 'the wing'. Whatever it wins, it does not keep. It must constantly manipulate events in order to turn them into 'opportunities'.  
(De Certeau, 1984: xix)

The temporality of the production of public space is prominent in the work of De Certeau and will be further discussed in the empirical chapters of the thesis to reveal the 'processual', 'becoming' and 'time-space divided' nature of public space. There is a distinct need to acknowledge the human agency driving the 'processes' (re)producing and/or challenging hegemonic understandings of public space.

As Amin and Thrift argue, 'we accept that urban practices are in many ways



disciplined, but we also believe that the practices constantly exceed the disciplinary envelope' (2002: 4). Lefebvre's conceptual triad caters for the way in which space is 'lived', looking directly at how people can use space creatively - to challenge the dominant ideologies operating throughout that space - with his notion of 'spaces of representation'. However, Lefebvre does not clearly state the centrality of the human body in contesting or rearticulating dominant norms. Performativity is a theoretical framework that helps us to understand how space is socially constructed as stable through the repetition of bodily behaviour. The repetition of 'acceptable' behaviour (re)constructs the dominant norms driving space, by conforming to hegemonic understandings of what is appropriate in a particular space. As will be discussed in the following chapter, people can also behave in ways that highlight the instability of taken-for-granted socially and spatially constructed norms.

Space needs to be thought about as brought into being through performances and as a 'performative articulation' of power (Gregson and Rose 2000: 434). Gregson and Rose argue that it is not only social actors that are produced by power, but also the spaces in which they perform. Specific performances 'bring spaces into being' (2004: 441). Instead of thinking of spaces as areas with particular boundaries around, they should be imagined as 'articulated moments in networks of social relations and understandings' (Hillier, 1998: 208). As different groups give different meanings to space through performances, its multilayered and multidimensional character is illustrated (Know, 1995). Different people understand space in many ways and it is therefore lived, used and performed in diverse ways. The importance of the performances of individuals in the (re)creation of notions of 'public space' will be discussed more carefully in Chapter Six, in relation to how the naturalisation of heterosexuality in space is (or is not) challenged by the existence of queer venues in the premium areas of contemporary cities. However, it is to how the naturalisation of heterosexuality is (re)produced in, through, and across public space that this section now turns.

Hubbard and Sanders provide a crystallised explanation of how



heterosexuality's normative status is maintained through performative actions and practices, stating that:

Far from being 'natural', then, heterosexuality is something that is produced (and made to appear natural) through repeated spatial performances of desire. These occur within different contexts of legal and moral regulation, which serve to define what sexual identities, and practices are permissible in public and private spaces.  
(2003: 56)

Public space, then, is (re)constructed and (re)presented as heterosexual through a whole host of relations that must be repeated regularly and corporealised to the extent that they become written *on* and written *by* the body through the behaviour and practices of everyday citizens. At this point, it is essential to heed Skeggs' (1999) advice not to confuse the performative with performance.

As argued by Butler:

Performativity must not be understood as a singular 'act', but rather, as reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names...the regulatory norms of 'sex' work in a performative fashion that constitute the materiality of bodies and, more specifically, to materialise the body's sexual difference in the service of the consolidation of the heterosexual imperative. (1993: 2)

So when examining how Newcastle's Pink Triangle and Gateshead's BALTIC are socially and spatially (re)constructed, it is essential to look at the performative practices incorporated into and/or challenging such (re)constructions. This will be carefully examined in relation to the (self) policing of sexuality in space in the following chapter. However, it is important to note that 'the mix of performative activities available in any given place at any time is not independent of the physical, social and economic environment in which they take place' (Harvey, 2000: 98). This will be critically explored in relation to the interrelationship between the physical design and social use of the BALTIC contemporary art factory in Chapter Seven. Having introduced some of the ways in which challenges to hegemonic understandings of space have been theorised, this chapter now considers the multiplicity of public space.



### 5.5: Multiple public spaces for multiple publics

That space is constantly (re)produced and (re)constructed through a whole host of interconnected yet seemingly distinct ideas, physical locales and everyday activities has problematised the creation of any uniform definition for 'public space'. Another related and recurring theme within the literature is that public spaces do not only consist of very different elements, but also, due to the multiple ways they can be constantly (re)configured, that each public space can develop an individual identity. If one thinks about different types of public spaces within contemporary cities, or even different public spaces throughout history, one begins to notice that they can have very different functions and hence be perceived and used in very different ways by potential users. For example, the types of activities afforded by a city centre square can be very different to those provided by a public park, which in turn can be dissimilar to the types of activities taking place within a library, and this can have a direct influence on the types of people that they will attract.

People are aware of the differences in the opportunities provided in the diverse public spaces of the city, frequenting particular spaces to engage in the activities they perceive to be available there. However, a key insight into the changing nature of public spaces within the urban realm has been that it is not only the possible activities taking place there that influences the likelihood of particular kinds of users, but also the nature of the other members of 'the public' that will be attracted to the space. As articulated by Hajer and Reijndorp, this is increasingly changing the nature of sociability in the city as: 'Society has become an archipelago of enclaves, and people from different backgrounds have developed more effective spatial strategies to meet the people that they want to meet and to avoid the people that they want to avoid' (2001: 5). The acknowledgement of the existence of exclusive enclaves and ghettos within cities is nothing new for urban studies. However, the extent to which it is increasing, inspiring the argument that on the level of the urban field, it is possible to distinguish between countless monocultural enclaves (Hajer and Reijndorp, 2001), is illustrative of the increased severity of such claims.



If it is true that everyday city inhabitants and users are choosing to spend the majority of their time in selectively chosen areas of the city, notably areas they associate with their own identity affiliations and which subsequently (re)produce their sense of identity, to what extent does this affect the nature of public space? The previous chapter discussed some of the exclusionary mechanisms taking place in the (re)construction of the notion of 'public space' (specifically in relation to the commodification of public space). However, it is essential to discuss how such changes impact upon the type of spatial framework needed to understand contemporary public spatiality if such accusations hold true in the primary research component of this thesis. If 'in the new cultural geography everyone creates their own cities for themselves, a combination of various places that are important for the individual' (Hajer and Reijndorp, 2001: 56), how do we begin to understand the spatiality of such changes?

The 'archipelago of enclaves' metaphor demonstrates that as people withdraw into spaces, where people who share similar interests, beliefs and more often than not fundamental identity affiliations, surround them, public space, like public spheres, can be seen to be stratified. As opposed to there being an existing overarching public space where all members of 'the public' can enter into on equal terms, public spaces can be considered as identity based, where only people who ascribe and attest to the social norms and expectations of that space are or permitted to enter. Different spaces will have different affordances and attractions to different groups, and therefore enclaves or ghettos are created which revolve around shared beliefs about what is appropriate and/or enjoyable to do in a given space.

For many, the question should not be how to hold back this transformation into an 'archipelago', but rather what possibilities this new socio-spatial reality offers for the creation of 'new and interesting forms of public domain' (Hajer and Reijndorp, 2001: 60). However, for others, public space is still often viewed as a space which should allow for 'unassimilated otherness' (Young, 1990) and the 'being together of strangers' (Sandercock, 1998). This raises a number of questions: Is heterogeneity a fundamental characteristic of public space? Is it



the dynamism of public spaces that makes them public? Do public spaces even allow for dynamism in an era of purification, sanitisation and commercialisation? Have we reached the end of public space?

Noting that cities exhibit distinctive geographies of social difference and power relations, where space functions as a modality through which urban identities are formed (Balshaw and Kennedy, 2000), Fraser argues that: 'In stratified societies, arrangements that accommodate contestation among a plurality of competing publics better promotes the ideal of participatory parity than does a single, comprehensive, overarching public' (1992: 131). Rather than an entry into *the* general public sphere, Fraser argues that we should look at empowering the existing, competing public spheres that she calls 'subaltern counterpublics'. The following chapter will examine the utility of the theoretical framework of the 'counterpublic' in understanding the Pink Triangle.

## 5.6: Conclusion

The term 'space', like that of 'public', circulates within academic, policy and popular discourses with more frequency than precision. To continue a critical exploration of what the term 'public space' means, this chapter has sought to put its second structuring concept - 'space' - under the analytical spotlight. As opposed to accepting it as a seemingly innate and innocuous notion, by drawing on some of the multiple theoretical frameworks engaging with 'space', it reveals itself as a complex and multidimensional phenomenon. On close inspection, 'space' appears to consist of ideational, symbolic, instrumental and material qualities – all in varying forms and degrees depending on the 'space' in question.

Drawing on the work of critical spatial theorists, most importantly that of Lefebvre and his contemporary followers, this chapter has set out a spatial framework capable of accounting for the multiple dimensions of urban public space. Incorporating Lefebvre's conceptual triad with recent theories of the social production of social space (i.e. socio-spatialisation), the spatial framework is capable of accounting for the lived, perceived and conceived



elements of public space. It can take seriously the material, mental and social components perpetually activating space as 'public'. This chapter has argued that space is unstable, in flux and becoming. The changing and processual nature of space has direct impacts upon the way in which notions of 'public space' are (re)produced and (re)articulated in the contemporary urban realm.

What the spatialisation of public space shows is reminiscent of the conclusions of the previous chapter, i.e. that space does not naturally exist as public and/or private, but is (re)produced and (re)constructed as such through the spatial inflection of social norms. Nonetheless, the distinction between 'public' and 'private' is 'ingrained in our practical experience of the spatial organisation of social life' (Brain, 1997: 237). Hegemonic groups within any given society predominantly drive this spatial organisation of life. Therefore, the social norms of hegemonic groups, e.g. 'natural' and 'normal' heterosexuals, become spatialised through regular and repetitive *performativity*, appearing as the 'norm'. As argued by Borden et al.: "Normality" is defined, to a significant degree, geographically, and deviance from this normality is shot through with geographical assumptions concerning what and who belong where' (2000: 24).

As space is socially (re)produced and (re)constructed, it is through space that such (re)articulations are open to contest. Public space is often the site and the stake of contestation. As this chapter has argued, the normative assumptions underpinning everyday public space are open to challenge and can be understood using the theoretical frameworks of 'resistance' and 'transgression'. Power relations are not unilateral and subordinate groups can use their agency to confront their suppressors (Foucault, 1996). That challenges are often played out in, through, and across space, highlights the importance of 'public space' in the struggles for the 'right to the city' and the right to difference – specifically for minority groups. Space is constituted of multiple conceptions, perceptions and lived realities and it is the interplay of these elements in everyday life that will determine the form and function of contemporary public space.



Having set out a theoretical framework that can be used to explore Newcastle's Centre for Life and Gateshead's BALTIC art house, the following two chapters aim to enliven Lefebvre's spatial triad and more contemporary understandings of 'socio-spatialisation'. The empirical chapters argue that to understand how urban public space is (re)produced and (re)articulated, a high-resolution approach to carrying out empirical research is required. An understanding of everyday public space cannot come through theory alone. Despite the specificity of the empirical insights generated at the case study sites, they can be used for the theoretical refinement and extension of 'public space' more broadly. As argued in this chapter, such theoretical extension and refinement will include – in the very least - accounting for the multiplicity of public space, its changing, contested, performative and processual nature.



## Chapter 6

### Newcastle's Pink Triangle: Examining the relationship between sexuality and space

'The city is not merely a stage on which a pre-existing, reconstructed sexuality is displayed and acted out; it is also a space where sexuality is generated' (Bech, 1997: 118).

#### Figure 6: A vignette from my research field diary

**Location:** Twist Bar, Times Square – in the northern part of the Pink Triangle

**Date:** Friday 25<sup>th</sup> November 2005

**Time:** 7pm-8pm

#### Account snapshot:

*It is that time of night again, when the lights go down, the music gets louder and the clientele seems to change somewhat. I am sitting in Twist, a bar which I have discovered is predominantly used by the lesbian and Transvestite users (I wonder if that is the case tonight) of the Pink Triangle, and I am waiting for the weekend to begin. Friday (more than Saturday) normally brings with it hustle and bustle as the bars around the scene are populated with people starting the weekend celebrations. Tonight it seems no different. As 7.10 pm approaches, the first group of clientele arrive. Four (young 20-something?) women walk in and head straight to the bar. I notice that they seem to be in high spirits as they are laughing and joking with each other and the (young, 20ish, very camp) barman. As the barman gets to work on the drinks, the women look around the bar, but my friend and I are the only people in the place. We smile and they smile back and come and sit on a table across from us. I wonder whether the group are wondering why I am here – if they ask me, I will tell them about my research. They probably just think that I am out for a few drinks.*

*We are all sitting near the large plate-glass windows that look out across the grey and dreary Times Square. It is a good spot to sit and watch the world go by as you watch people crossing the square (possibly) on their way back from work (in suits), on their way to a nearby pub (with more animation, but less urgency). As one group of young women pass through the square (again 4 of them, 20-somethings, kitted out in Triple S clothing), the girls sitting next to me wave them over. I can over-hear their greetings as the other girls enter the bar and it appears that they all go to the same College. It is interesting that a lot of people on the scene seem to know one another quite well. I wonder if it is because of the size of the Pink Triangle, the 'public' that frequent the spaces, the times or days that different groups go out? As the second group of women make their way to the bar a couple come in (I assume that they are a couple as they're holding hands). They look a little older (perhaps in their 30s), and they go to the bar (without making conversation with the bar lady) and take their drinks to the back of Twist. At the back of Twist the couple are away from the windows (intentionally or unintentionally I'm not sure), but it provides more privacy as the booths have lower lighting and the music is less invasive. Twist allows for 'privacy' in some spaces and 'public display' in others...*



## 6: Introduction

In the previous chapter, a spatial framework that can be used to guide empirical investigations into the ways in which the public spaces of the contemporary city are (re)produced was developed. Drawing on the work of Lefebvre, the importance of accounting for the conceived, perceived and lived dimensions of everyday spatiality was illustrated. It is in the Centre for Life (CfL) area of Newcastle-Upon-Tyne that the critical spatial theory developed in the previous chapter will first be engaged. Identifying, describing and analysing the ideational, symbolic and material processes through which one part of the CfL is (re)articulated as a public and/or private space, this chapter will highlight the fundamental importance of the 'grand western' dichotomy in structuring Newcastle's gay village – the Pink Triangle.

Synthesising high-resolution primary observations with key themes within the existing literature, this chapter explores the way in which notions of public and private structure everyday space and spatial practice, with specific reference to the relationship between sexuality and space in the Pink Triangle. By drawing on the example of the relationship between sexuality and space in the contemporary city, this chapter will bring to life Probyn's conviction that:

Space is a pressing matter and it matters which, how and where individual bodies with individual identities press up against it. Most important of all is who these bodies are with; in what historical and actual spatial configuration they find and define themselves.

(1995: 81)

The opportunities and limitations of the 'historical and spatial configuration' of a gay village will be evaluated, from the level of the bodily experiences it enables, to its position in society more broadly.

Incorporating insights from over 15 stakeholders within the Pink Triangle – including, managers, users and regulators - the impacts of the public/private distinction in structuring socio-spatial behaviour will be exposed as all pervasive. From the physical design of the space, to the prices of the drinks served in the venues, the exclusionary nature of the types of 'publicness'



accepted and 'public' users welcomed into public space will be explored. The Pink Triangle, a space that is purportedly more inclusive and less discriminatory than the general public spaces of the city, will be revealed as a site (re)produced by practices that conform to a very specific set of commercially driven cosmopolitan practices, which have a discriminatory basis of their own. Who and what is welcome into commercial gay villages will be critiqued and potential ways of theorising these alternative public spatialities considered.

The 'scene' seems to be perpetually set-up as a backlash against, and/or escape from, dominant heteronormative spatial practices, defining acceptable sexual conduct in the public spaces of the city. Central to understanding the complex and multi-faceted relations and practices (re)producing the 'scene', is a critical investigation into the way in which the public/private dichotomy is discursively and practically (re)constructed through sexual norms and the associated acceptable practices. Such norms and practices are often built upon a very specific heterosexual hegemonic ideology, having real spatial implications. This chapter highlights the importance of looking at the socio-spatialisation of the public/private dichotomy in studying sexuality and space, by drawing on, illuminating and advancing some of the theoretical debates surrounding 'public', 'space' and 'public space' as discussed in the previous chapters.

### **6.1: A tale of two villages: The 'public' gay village and 'private' science village?**

The facilities provided in the 'gay village' are primarily clustered around the CfL (**Figure 6.1**). The CfL is promoted as 'a major science village' (Dexter, 2003: 1) developed to carry out pioneering genetic research, whilst simultaneously educating the public through the use of (p)leisure space by bringing them to this area for 'edutainment'.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> The creation of 'edutainment' spaces - a hybrid of 'education' and 'entertainment' spaces - in what were previously more 'traditional' open public spaces of the city, is arguably changing how 'the public' both use such city spaces and engage with one another. Light and Smith (1998) have noted how such accusations stimulate the belief that public space is becoming increasingly commodified and, therefore, intrinsically exclusionary.



Figure 6.1: A Map of the Centre for Life area



CfL's remit confirms its role as providing 'a major new educational and leisure attraction for the people of the area' (Dexter, 2003: 19). In 2004, visitor numbers were 230,000, making it one of the principal attractions in the region. With 'over 24,000 schoolchildren visiting this venue per year' (Jackson, pers. comm., 2004), this space caters for potentially diverse - even diametrically opposed - user groups. Coupled with the fact that CfL is a centre for specialist genetic research with medical facilities attached to its 'edutainment' complex that help people with debilitating genetic disorders or infertility problems, the sheer multiplicity of the potential users of this multifunctional space, in the words of its Chief Executive, Alistair Balls, 'becomes almost concerning' (pers. comm., 2005).

New Labour, and urban designers and town planners more broadly, increasingly promote the development of 'multi-use' and 'multi-functional' public spaces (CABE, 2003; ODPM, 2004). Government policy considers such



spaces to bring a range of users to an area, subsequently facilitating 'stranger-sociability' (Tonkiss, 2005). The different 'publics' that the CfL site caters for makes the area an appealing empirical case study site for investigating how different understandings of 'public space' are (re)produced in the everyday city. The site is marketed as two socially separate villages, a 'gay village' on the one hand, and a 'science village' on the other. There are even unfounded rumours that the latter village is trying to eliminate the former in a particularly fundamental way - through the eradication of the gay gene (Balls, pers. comm., 2005). The way in which the two socially distinct 'villages' operate in such spatial proximity provides an interesting socio-spatial dynamic. Within this dynamic, the role of notions of 'publicness' and 'privacy' in structuring different parts of this area at different times, is significant to the broader aims of understanding contemporary urban public space.

It could be argued that the CfL is a 'private space', due to the relatively high fee charged for entrance to the facilities; the personal nature of the medical treatment taking place there; and the top-secret research being conducted - which is even restricted in terms of the public dissemination of knowledge. It is impossible to gain admission to the majority of the areas within the CfL because of access restrictions operating on the site, maintaining confidentiality around the sensitive activities taking place there (Balls, pers. comm., 2005). However, a number of facilities in the Pink Triangle require no direct entrance fee (excluding the nightclubs) and members of the public are able to wander around these venues at their own leisure, providing it be within opening hours.<sup>94</sup> It is the contrast between the exclusions harboured by the 'private' nature of the science village, and the more publicly accessible facilities of the Pink Triangle, which made the gay village a more suitable case study site for a thesis investigating public spaces in the contemporary urban realm.

The primary research conducted for this project focussed on the key spaces represented on the official map of the 'Pink Triangle' (Figure 6.1.1). The

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<sup>94</sup> Whilst there is no direct entrance fee to these spaces, because they are commercial venues, to be able to access the spaces and activities offered, a certain degree of financial (and cultural) capital is required (see discussion below).



managers, regulators and users of the Pink Triangle interviewed as part of this research agreed that the pubs and clubs within the area, and Times Square, constituted the 'queer scene'. Whilst most bars and clubs maintain an individual identity, and often serve different members of the 'queer public', in terms of symbolism, city centre management, ownership, regulation and use, the area could be broadly defined as a network of 'queer spaces' (see below for further discussion). The gay village, therefore, provides the focus of this chapter.<sup>95</sup> Whereas, at first glance, the characterisation of the science village as 'private' and the gay village as 'public' may seem acceptable, further investigation suggests otherwise. On closer examination, the gay village is not so 'public' after all, but harbours a great number of exclusions of its own.

### **6.1.1: Originating on the margins: A site description of the Pink Triangle**

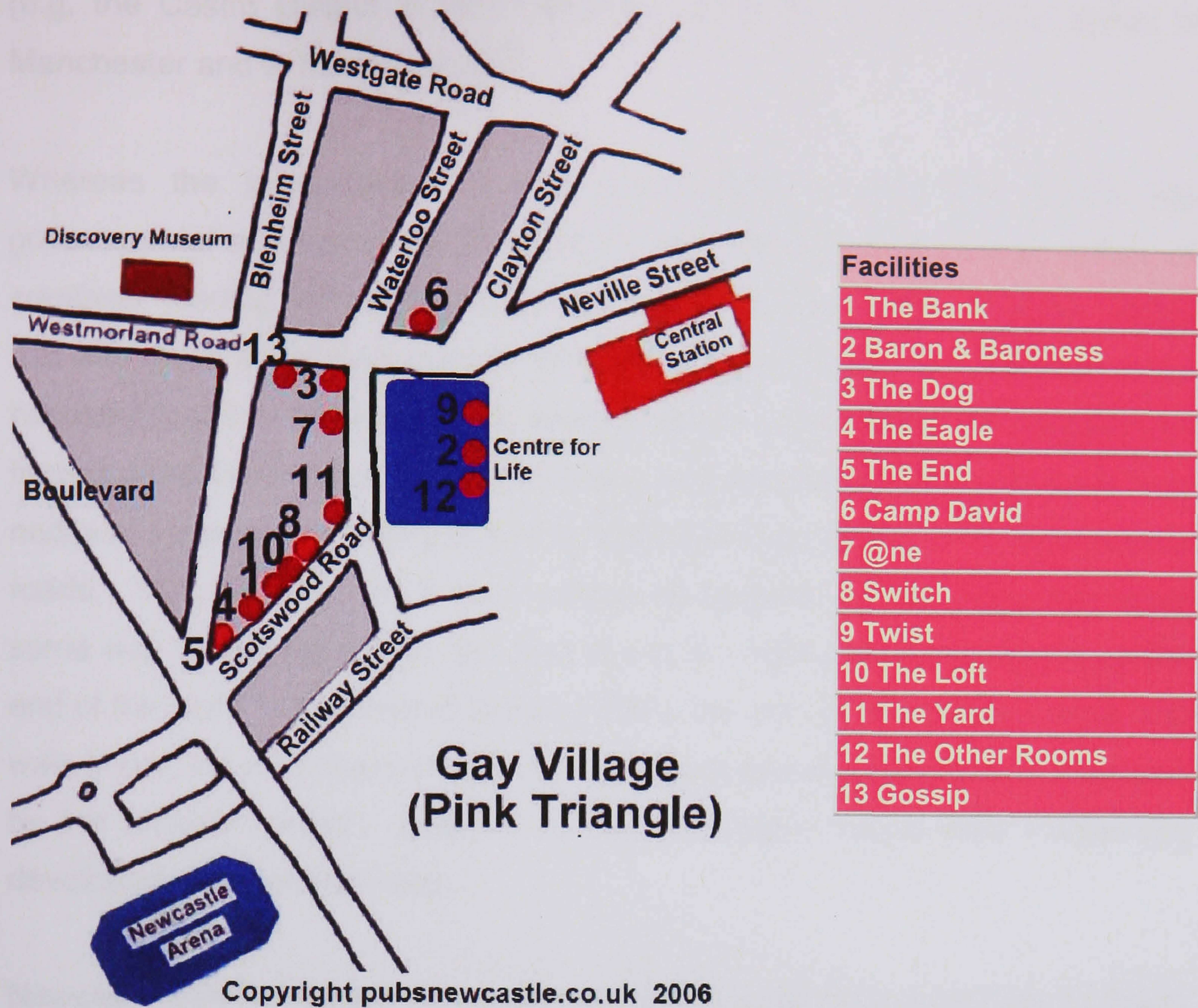
The location of Newcastle's gay village is widely known amongst the majority of the city's inhabitants and the broader 'queer' community. *The Crack*, Newcastle's longest running and most popular listings magazine, observes that taking upon the role of an alternative space for people of non-normative sexualities in the North East of England: 'Newcastle's queer scene has a long established and now more definite location, locally named as the Pink Triangle' (May, 2002: 17). Whereas there are a handful of other queer-friendly venues within Newcastle, the Pink Triangle is 'the only city centre area marketing itself at the queer community' (Pink Triangle website, May 2005). Newcastle's gay scene consists mainly of 13 assorted bars, The Powerhouse and The Lodge nightclubs, Betty's Cafe and several takeaways – most notably The Happy Chip, where the circulation of 'queer' associated goods through the sale of condoms, lube and poppers makes this everyday space feel incredibly 'queer'. These establishments form a roughly triangular shape in the backwater of the city centre, directly to the west of Newcastle's central train station – hence the name Pink Triangle (see Figure 6.1.1).

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<sup>95</sup> To go back to Burgess's (1984) field site selection criteria, as outlined in Chapter Three, the case study sites have to be accessible and permissible.



Figure 6.1.1: Map of the facilities in the Pink Triangle



Newcastle’s queer scene gravitated to its current location from St Mary’s Place over 25 years ago. Possessing similar locational characteristics as many other gay scenes, the area was derelict, situated on the city fringe and adjacent to a wide selection of primary modes of transport (Chatterton, 2001). Historically, spaces serving the gay community tended to locate in marginal areas, their marginal spatial location mirroring the marginal social status of their users (Sibley, 1995). Queers were (and to a certain extent still are) often ostracised from the everyday public spaces of the city by an intolerant and threatening general (read heterosexual) public (Collins, 2006). Subsequently, the initial location of what were to be the seedbeds for today’s Pink Triangle are unsurprising as traditionally queer pubs, clubs and services have tended to develop in areas which are peripheral and nodal, and are characterised by marginality and entrepreneurial ability. Queer facilities have more often than



not developed in marginal parts of cities for both social and economic reasons (e.g. the Castro District in San Francisco; Soho in London; Canal Street in Manchester and in Birmingham).<sup>96</sup>

Whereas the incorporation of the maximisation of the pink pound into governmental strategies, which hoped to see the rise of 'a diverse culture of creativity' leading to the development of 'cosmopolitan cities' (Florida, 2005), has witnessed a turnaround in the fortunes of 'gay villages', the influence of the historical location of gay venues should not be undermined. A predominant feature of spatial location is that many gay venues have tended to develop near nodes of transport, proximity to a train station or bus station, or to major arterial roads. This not only offers easy access to facilities for the many that travel some way to use the scene, but also allows for higher levels of security at the end of the night. According to Brown (1997), the shorter the distance there is to walk home, the less chance there is of being recognised, harassed or assaulted by the broader 'public'. Spaces serving the 'queer' public were traditionally developed out of 'public' view.

Newcastle's Pink Triangle may have changed dramatically in the past 25 years, moving from a small number of scattered venues to a space that is now widely publicised as a more composite and established gay village, but its location bears many of the hallmarks of a historically marginal space. It is located next to Newcastle's central train station, alongside the A189 (the main bypass which links to the A1) and within a public transport hotspot with bus and coach stations nearby. Equally, Newcastle's west end had also suffered particularly badly from industrial decline and from the 1980s was often characterised as the degenerated part of the city, resulting in low property prices which encouraged investment from queer entrepreneurs (see Chatterton and Hollands, 2003).

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<sup>96</sup> Although some argue that society is becoming more open-minded, queer groups are still one of the most oppressed groups in society (Casey, 2004; Thomas, 1996). It is this oppression that forces 'queers' to socialise in areas that are unlikely to be frequented by the 'general public' (i.e. heterosexual public) so that they can take advantage of the resultant low property prices (for what is often classed as inherently risky business).



### 6.1.2: Creating the gay village: Claiming the glory for urban transformation

At first glance, the contemporary 'gay village' appears to be diametrically dissimilar to the derelict and marginal lands of earlier venues catering for the queer community. There is a general consensus that: 'It is unbelievable how much the facilities provided for gays and lesbians have, on the surface, improved in recent years in Newcastle's Pink Triangle' (Albert, pers. comm., 2005). Whilst this chapter discusses the virtues and problems of the new look and highly stylised commodified gay village below, it is worth noting some of the divergent reasons given for why such radical changes occurred. There is a degree of mystery shrouding the reality behind the impetus spurring the development of Newcastle's 'more glamorous and glitzy gay village' (Julia, pers. comm., 2005). Some council members clamber to take the credit; entrepreneurs stand forward to stake their claim to its success; and Newcastle City Council occasionally claims that it was predominantly down to its financial input and political commitment. In truth, an amalgamation of these factors contributed to creating the Pink Triangle.<sup>97</sup>

Collins (2006) proposes that the successful development of the Chinatown area of Newcastle, established in the 1990s, prompted NCC's attempt to create a 'gay themed quarter', located around St. James Boulevard and the East Blenheim Street area of Newcastle's notorious west end. Townsend (pers. comm., 2005.) argues that the reason behind the development was the apparent success of Manchester's 'Canal Street' – following the popularity of the television series 'Queer as Folk' –, which NCC hoped to imitate by regenerating another degenerate part of the city centre.<sup>98</sup> Whilst NCC is willing to step forward to take credit for the development of an area catering for a 'minority group' within its electorate, the motivations behind its involvement in

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<sup>97</sup> NCC's official line on whether it had actively supported or promoted the development of a 'gay village' has changed over time, often in line with broader public condemnation or support (Casey, 2004). NCC's position changed in accordance with who it was dealing with i.e. members of public who were disgusted at the thought of the promotion of a 'gay village', or the 'queer community' who flagged up their marginalisation from the broader public spaces of the city, and the need for facilities that catered for their private interest (Brooks, pers. comm., 2005).

<sup>98</sup> 'Queer as Folk' was a controversial, but highly popular, TV series aired on Channel 4 which charted the lives of three gay men in Manchester's Canal Street, where the link between a cosmopolitan city and a gay village was explicit (see Skeggs, 2004).



the Pink Triangle remains an area of contention.

Following New Labour's guidance (see Chapter Two), the proposal to develop a gay village purportedly arose out of 'public consultation', including discussions with a panel representing the 'queer community' about NCC's Draft City Centre Action Plan 1999-2000.<sup>99</sup> NCC made explicit references to the proposed development of the 'gay village' in its City Centre Action Plan, in relation to suggestions made in the consultation process (NCC, 2002a: 36).<sup>100</sup> Chatterton and Hollands write that:

The rapid development towards what is now a slightly more visible gay village ('the Pink Triangle') in Newcastle, is in large part, attributable to a proactive stance adopted by a small group of senior members of its planning department and the relevant licensing magistrates. (2001: 22)

Collins (2006) supports this, stating that in light of a real background of political will to foster equality (as formally accepted in The Newcastle Plan – A Community Strategy for the City, 2002a), these parties met in 1999 with a view to removing obstacles to the clustering of gay service-sector establishments. Whereas Chatterton and Hollands aver that the intention was primarily to improve 'the quality of social and recreational provision for a then underdeveloped lesbian/gay population', believing that 'these problems were generated by an inadequate number of liquor licenses in the city' (2001: 11), this is a naive appraisal. Whilst it is true that 'the alleviation of this specific constraint, by municipal and regulatory authorities, directly facilitated and accelerated its expanding gay-service sector' (Chatterton and Hollands, 2001: 12), there are other more significant factors behind the motivations of NCC's support for such enlargement.

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<sup>99</sup> This was controversial as the members on the 'queer panel' were all entrepreneurs, who had an obvious interest in commercial profit, influencing the types of development they proposed for the gay village. This brings questions about 'representativeness' in policy consultation processes to the fore, as discussed in Chapter Two in relation to the problems of participatory processes.

<sup>100</sup> Some of the bar owners, for example Adrian Gadd, are on paper as saying that NCC publicly announced that the west end had been earmarked as a gay village in the hope that landlords would refuse to sell their property for a reasonable price or at all, therefore, limiting the growth of the gay village (Collins and Cameron, 2001).



Alistair Balls declared that the application for extra licensing laws only came after CfL (the body that owns the buildings housing the queer venues) failed to attract the 'upper class boutiques' which they had hoped to bring to this underused part of the city (pers. comm., 2005). With queer venues already existing in the area, and a desire from entrepreneurs to invest further in this part of the city, the next best option, and ultimately the second choice of NCC, was the creation of a 'gay village'. Local authority interest in the development of the 'gay village' was primarily motivated by the recognition of the economic potential of maximising the pink pound as had been done in other British cities such as Manchester (Skeggs and Binnie, 2004), Brighton (Browne, 2006) and London (Bell, 2001). It is a clear example of policy transfer, whereby local authorities in one locale attempt to recreate the successes of other authorities by adopting similar policy processes in the hope of achieving similar outcomes.

NCC's Building Bridges Strategy specified the development of the Pink Triangle as a part of its overall cultural programme.<sup>101</sup> It highlights the creation of a 'gay village' as one of the main objectives for an 'inclusive public culture'.<sup>102</sup> However, just as Skeggs and Binnie (2004) note in relation to Manchester's Canal Street, the promotion of the Pink Triangle must be seen in the wider context of place promotion under neo-liberalism (as will be discussed more thoroughly below). The endorsement of such cultural quarters has become a feature of contemporary British urban policy, which aims to turn around the fortunes of the contemporary urban realm (Bell and Jayne, 2003). There has been an increase in policy initiatives based on the promotion of cultural-entrepreneurialism and the establishment of public-private initiatives, with their somewhat reduced public accountability, raising some pertinent issues and concerns about the 'publicness' of areas such as the Pink Triangle (Evans, 2005).

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<sup>101</sup> NCC's cultural strategy, 'Building Bridges', is a combined effort with Gateshead Council, prompted by the Labour government's request for all local authorities to work with partners to develop a clear cultural strategy for their area by March 2002. The document explicitly states that 'culture can drive change', and that culture will be 'at the heart of the modernisation and renewal of Newcastle Gateshead' (NCC and GC, 2002: 2).

<sup>102</sup> That the development of a spatially separate quarter to cater for 'queer' users of the city is considered to promote an 'inclusive public culture' is somewhat ironic, as will be discussed further below in relation to theorising the space as a 'counterpublic'.



In sum, because of the consultation and planning of NCC, most notably some of its planners and its Special Projects Officer, Simon Brooks, and a substantial commitment on the part of queer entrepreneurs, within the past 8 years over £25 million have been invested into Newcastle's Pink Triangle (PT website, May 2007). It is significant that over 90% of the investment has been entrepreneurial (i.e. private), with NCC merely providing the funds for basic infrastructure.<sup>103</sup> Within the development process of the Pink Triangle, the local authority can be characterised as a facilitator of urban regeneration, with the private sector acting as the key providers and managers, supporting the claims made in Chapter Two about the centrality of private corporations in delivering the urban renaissance. Regardless of the origin of the investment, and the reasons behind it, the physical transformation of the area has been dramatic.

Following the decision to create a gay village, there have been dramatic physical changes in the area and this has intensified over the duration of this research project, seeing an increase in the number of 'queer' service outlets rise from 8 to 18. There has also been an extension of non-queer services provided in and around the area through the development of the multi-million pound mixed use 'City-Quadrant' complex. The City Quadrant provides a number of new restaurants, a selection of cultural activities, office space and new residential flats. Two multinational corporation brand hotels are now located within the vicinity - The Holiday Inn and a hotel chain that actively advertises in the gay press, The Jurys Inn. To understand the urban transformation occurring within the Pink Triangle, it is vital to explore the associated social and spatial changes in relation to the types of opportunities and spaces that they provide for potential users. However, to provide a context for this, it is important to examine the role of the gay scene in queer lives and lifestyles more broadly.

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<sup>103</sup> Whereas NCC has claimed that the reasons for the minimal investment are due to the budgetary restrictions, there have been claims of 'backdoor homophobia' made towards NCC. The initiatives introduced by NCC have been regularly described as a façade, an attempt to pacify those highlighting its previously pro-heterosexual development policies (Cooper, 1999).



## 6.2: Understanding the 'scene' in queer lifestyles

Areas such as the Pink Triangle, that contain a relatively high concentration of services targeted towards the queer community, and which subsequently often serve as a site for the potential (re)production of non-normative sexual identities, have been described using an inherently spatial metaphor – the 'scene'. The 'scene' is a multidimensional phenomenon that has earned itself a certain degree of mythical status among queer communities worldwide. At best, it is seen as an ideal towards which queers strive – to create their own community, both cultural and material, which evades heteronormative ways of being, yet which operates in and is respected within global and local society. However, at worst, it is viewed as a seedy, even stifling, manifestation of the coming together of sexually deviant, marginalised people to socialise, with the ultimate aim of finding a partner and then having sex. This research discovered that the 'scene' is perceived differently by different people, highlighting that there are as many diverse opinions about this mental, social and spatial phenomenon as there are people who have either been to or heard about such locales.

This research discerned a lack of consensus over what the 'scene' is, and more specifically, what it *means* to its increasingly varied queer community. However, the findings supported Chatterton's (2001) argument that far from being a failure of its own potential, the 'scene' is often proposed as fast becoming not only a proud and visible element of queer urban lives, but also an enticing part of urban lives of those outside of this community. By critically examining the relations and practices that animate the queer 'scene' in Newcastle, a clearer understanding of the relationship between sexuality and space can be developed. This, in turn, enables the role of the 'scene' in queer lifestyles and identity formation to be further scrutinised. What becomes clear is that the relationship between sexuality and space often revolves around competing understandings of space as 'public' or 'private'.

The metaphorical language used to describe the polar opposite positions between which many queers using the Pink Triangle seemed to sway, harbour



obvious spatial connotations. The area in which queers feel more comfortable in displaying their non-normative sexuality and more inclined to act on it or be (socially and spatially) 'out', is known as the 'the scene'. Alternatively, the places where queers often feel more inclined to avoid any open display of their sexuality and are more inclined to stay (socially and spatially) 'in', is commonly called 'the closet'. To put it very simplistically, when describing whether they are 'in' or 'out', queers are often referring to whether they are comfortable about displaying their sexuality. This is often dependent upon whether they are in a space that is 'in', or 'out' of public view; or to put it another way, whether they are exposed to the critical and restricting gaze of the broader public, which is unmistakably heteronormative. Such observations are directly related to Iveson's (2007) understanding of the public/private divide, as discussed in Chapter Four, whereby what is public is considered as something that is 'revealed' i.e. 'out' and what is private is something that is 'hidden' i.e. 'in'.

The spatial metaphors of the 'closet' where queers are 'in', or the 'scene' where they are 'out', are crudely based around notions of publicness and privacy, which can be read as the key terms structuring understandings of sexual behaviour. Michael Brown argues that: 'The spatial locations and interactions between closet and room stands for the social interaction between public and private spheres' (2000: 10). Brown's observation about the interrelationship between a queer person's spatial location and the resultant social interactions facilitated through whether it is *perceived* as a 'public' or 'private' sphere may appear astute. However, this is a rather simplistic version of the complex everyday socio-spatial realities of queer lives. As Brown goes on to argue: 'Understandings of the closet [and the scene] in queer theory to date do not treat space as if it were constitutive of social relations; rather they take it to be merely representative of them' (2000: 16). As argued in the previous chapter, space is not simply a surface upon which social relations are written, but rather an active agent in the creation of socio-spatial relations.

Many respondents involved in this research believed that whilst certain areas provided greater opportunity to explore and display their non-heterosexual self,



their sexual behaviour was not merely dependent on the physical space they were in, i.e. if they were on the 'scene' or not, or within a space *perceived* as 'public' or 'private'. Instead, they claimed that their behaviour was reliant on the opportunities presented by the way in which relations of 'publicness' and 'privacy' would play out differently in different spaces and at different times, something which was dependent on a range of factors. For example, several interviewees commented that they had a lot of friends who were 'out', but who never went to the 'scene', often because of the exclusionary nature of the Pink Triangle: 'A lot of the members of the gay community will not find the scene very accessible or open to them. A lot of people therefore retreat to their own spaces to socialise in' (Albert, pers. comm., 2005). If social and spatial accessibility are two key criteria against which the 'publicness' of a space must be measured, then such substantive exclusions must be taken into consideration when critically exploring the 'public' nature of the Pink Triangle (this is something which will be discussed below in relation to the gender and age discriminations operating within venues).

By drawing on the theoretical framework for the social production of social space developed in Chapter Five, this chapter hopes to illustrate that to begin to grapple with the complexity of the everyday dynamics (re)constituting life on the 'scene', it is essential to heed Knopp and Brown's advice that:

The distinction between material and metaphorical spaces desperately needs to be collapsed. For example, the various 'closets' and 'scenes' described by queers are simultaneously material and representational spaces, whose power has everything to do with both their immediate material ground and contexts and their shared meanings. (2003: 422)

Only by considering the ways in which urban space is perceived, conceived and lived by its various stakeholders - and how these diverse interpretations come together - is it possible to begin to generate a clearer understanding of the nature of Newcastle's 'scene'. Underlying the multiple ways in which sexuality is performed or *lived* in, through and across space (either through display or concealment and all of the possibilities in-between) is often a consideration of whether the occupied space is *perceived* to be 'public' or



‘private’. Therefore, despite the fact that such dichotomous spatial designations are never as clear-cut as many would have us believe, they continue to influence how queer users feel like they can, and actually do, act in space, especially in relation to sexual expression.

### **6.2.1: Examining the relationship between sexuality and space through the public/private distinction**

There is a burgeoning literature examining the relationship between sexuality and space (for an overview see Collins, 2006). The way in which public space is structured around notions of a naturalised heterosexuality was critically explored in the previous chapter. This chapter aims to build on this argument by examining how the relationship between ‘queer’ sexualities and space is commonly (re)constructed through understandings of the public/private divide. The public/private dichotomy appears to be something that is particularly fundamental to the way in which sexuality is created, performed and judged in, through and across space, simultaneously influencing whether space is considered as ‘public’ or ‘private’. Accounting for these complex processes, this chapter explores how understandings of public space can be improved through a careful examination of the practices unfolding within the Pink Triangle, with specific reference to the multiple actors and uses involved.

As argued by Bell et al.: ‘We need no reminding that geographers are beginning to wake up to the idea that space is gendered and that space is sexed...The reverse has also been shown; gender, sex and sexuality are all ‘spaced’ (1995: 31-2). There is much discussion of how space is used as a resource to maintain the heteronormative status quo (Richardson, 1996; Valentine, 1995); directly challenge the heteronormative status quo (Cresswell, 1996; Hubbard, 2001; Skeggs, 1999; Staeheli, 1996); and develop ‘alternative’ realms of sexuality and sociability for sexual minorities (Califa, 1994; Warner, 2002). Nevertheless, how the multiple disciplines that constitute ‘sexuality studies’ conceptualise space suffers from an obvious and fundamental problem. As articulated by Knopp and Brown: ‘Work dealing with queer issues has tended implicitly to employ a surprisingly conservative and static notion of space and



spatiality' (2003: 411).

The majority of commentators grant space a facilitative role in the (re)creation of sexual norms (including both non-normative, normative and any conflicts between them), recognising that such sexual relations are reflected through space. Hence, a static or a 'space as container' notion of space lingers on in many of the works spanning sexuality studies. Lefebvre's critique of 'space as a container' - space as an inert vessel that can be filled with activity - was a large part of the attraction of his conceptual triad in theorising everyday public space. It is in part the way in which space is often conceived as merely a stage on which social - and in this chapter, specifically sexual - relations can be enacted that this chapter aims critique. To go back to Bell et al.'s (1994) statement, it is important to acknowledge that sexuality and gender are both *spaced* and that space is *gendered* and *sexed*. Space and the social relations that seemingly play out through it are in fact co-constitutive of one another; the space and the social relations are socially constructed and spatially inflected. All of this must be considered if a truer understanding of the complexity of contemporary urban public space is to be developed.

As highlighted in earlier chapters, more specifically Chapter Five, it is essential to see the way in which public space and space more broadly is constantly being (re)produced through a complex matrix of relationships, most notably culture, power and difference (Hubbard and Sanders, 2003). Therefore, it is important to get to the heart of the issues surrounding why space is not simply 'just a passive backdrop to human behaviour and social actions' (Hubbard and Sanders, 2003: 78) and why it is actively involved in the (re)construction of sexuality in a fundamental way. Not all spaces offer the same kinds of opportunities and affordances for sexual minorities, and the reasoning behind the kinds of behaviours and activities enabled through different spatial sites is influential in relation to which and how certain spaces are used by specific groups.

Watson and Bridge illustrate how the relationship between public space, access



to that space and constructions of identity is a recurrent theme in writing on the city, arguing that 'ambiguity, fluidity and movement are metaphors that figure strongly' (2000: 371). The 'ambiguity, fluidity and movement' of space has created a more active notion of space demanding that: 'A more fluid and topologically complex interpretation of public and private space is necessary to understand the changing geographies of sexuality' (Hubbard and Sanders, 2003: 52). As argued in Chapter Five, thinking of space as purely 'public' or 'private' does not allow for recognition of the processual nature of space, and we must acknowledge that space can no longer be considered as a static and unchanging entity. Rather, we can begin to look at how spaces become described and prescribed as 'public' through the dominant representations of space and the kinds of spatial practice that they actively encourage.

Sexuality is often considered as a distinctively private affair, something that should be performed 'behind closed doors' and 'away from public view', chiming with a number of key terms used to describe the fundamental features of privacy, i.e. intimate, personal, discrete, pertaining to the individual and confined. However, within contemporary society, sex and sexuality is everywhere, it is no longer (if it ever was) confined to the private realm. You only have to watch TV, listen to the radio, walk down the street, read a daily newspaper or log on to the internet to see that sex is all-pervasive, it is something which is prolific within the 'public realm' – featuring more often than not as a key topic of 'public debate' and 'public concern'. It is ironic that something that is so prevalent in the public realm has managed to masquerade itself as something very private. Sexuality highlights the falsity of understanding public and private as designated societal spheres. Instead, the two labels are better understood as relations that play out in, through and across space, (re)constituting that space as public and/or private with very specific ideological underpinnings and beliefs being activated by those who have the power to make such designations. This is something which can be further developed by exploring everyday life in the Pink Triangle.



### 6.2.2: Place claiming and territoriality: Making a 'queer' space

The Pink Triangle has gradually developed a strong clientele that is creating use-value in this space beyond traditional land use identity (Holland, 2001). As with many gay 'scenes', ever since its inception, the Pink Triangle has reconfigured the spatial occupation of the area, with it now predominantly characterised by the key characteristics of visibility and clustering. According to Brown, this fits with international trends as: 'Parts of the urban landscape are being transformed into 'villages' by the creation of new lesbian and gay enclaves through the clustering of pubs and clubs and now other businesses' (1997: 14). It is speculated (Bell and Binnie, 2002; Collins, 2006) that visibility and clustering can be employed to sustain the growth of scenes which are socially and spatially significant to both people within and outside of the communities, and they can be used to describe the spatial manifestations of queer areas, such as the Pink Triangle, across the country. Indeed, according to NCC's Special Project Officer, visibility is one method of viewing the strength and the permanence embodied within the 'scene', leading to the development of a notion of territory within the Pink Triangle (Brooks, pers. comm., 2005).

There is something subtle yet fundamental about the way that queer users are adopting the Pink Triangle as a space where they feel able to express their sexuality more safely and with pride (or at least lack of shame - which is obviously qualitatively different); there is a dimension of territoriality to it. Ley describes how the power of place, especially in gay villages, is created from space by the installation of symbolism: 'Space becomes place through the implantation of people and events in the creation of a historically crafted landscape' (1989: 10). Ley describes how postmodernism has taken away the placelessness of the modernist era by bringing about a philosophical reorientation in society, including the use of art, culture, social movement and political activism to claim a space. As the diversity of urban subcultures increases, spatial specificity increases through the rediscovery of cultural symbols embodied in the built environment, and there emerges a new sensitivity to place-making or 'space-making for particular publics'. However, such 'space-making' relies on actors (re)fashioning that space in, for example,



ideational, symbolic, social and physical ways.

One of the key uses of 'queer' symbolism in the Pink Triangle (and in queer venues throughout the western world) has a long history of territorial association i.e. the 'rainbow flag' (see Figure 6.2.2).<sup>104</sup> In many of the venues, the 'rainbow flag' is flown outside of the building or displayed inside the venue on posters, stickers, beer mats etc. creating a 'direct association with the gay community' (Denise, pers. comm., 2005).

Figure 6.2.2: Flying the flag in the Pink Triangle



Many of the respondents commented on the 'rainbow flag', stating: 'it claims our space' (Frank, pers. comm., 42, 2005); 'the flag shows who belongs in this space' (Brenda, pers. comm., 2005); 'when I see the flag I know I'm somewhere where I'm welcome' (Julia, pers. comm., 2005). It is more than sheer coincidence that a flag, something directly associated with conquering and (re)claiming land, is routinely displayed within queer venues which are described as becoming increasingly characterised by a territoriality themselves. The flag represents a public declaration that this space welcomes and/or belongs to the 'queer' public.

The purpose of symbolism is to create a series of lifestyle signs, which identify

<sup>104</sup> The use of the rainbow flag in queer culture has been described as a metaphor for the diversity and 'gayness' (pun intended) of the queer 'community' (Ingram et al., 1997).



the people and uses of a particular area as distinct. In the case of the Pink Triangle, this is to mark the area as distinct from the general heterosexual 'public'. Sack defines territoriality as: 'The attempt by an individual or group to affect, influence or control people, phenomenon and relationships by delimiting and asserting control over a geographical area' (1986: 12). In other words, a geographical area, such as the Pink Triangle, becomes a territory or place, in this case a 'gay village', when there is an attempt to mould the behaviour of those within it and control its boundaries. Through the regulation and management strategies adopted by the owners and employees of the venues in the Pink Triangle (not to mention the frequent users) - and the subsequent impact upon the types of users, uses and activities operating within the space - there is a direct attempt to afford some control over the space the users are claiming. However, as opposed to controlling the boundaries of the venues and altering the behaviour of those within through purely tangible physical boundaries, such control is also asserted through more subtle and ephemeral means.

As Lefebvre (1991) has suggested, the social experience of space is always mediated by a system of meanings and symbolism that operates through the imagination.<sup>105</sup> Accordingly, there exists a *space of representation* that 'overlays physical space', which is 'directly lived through its associated images and symbols', and 'which the imagination seeks to change and appropriate' (Lefebvre, 1991: 45). The relation between identity and space, therefore, is not merely one of territorial identification, but one of continuous imagination linked to the social practices that are rooted in space. That is, not only the practices, but also the social imaginary has a spatial character (Batumen, 2003). As argued by my interviewees, the rainbow flag triggers something within their imagination, which makes them believe that this is somewhere where they are welcome, somewhere where they feel comfortable and belong. The use of the rainbow flag in the Pink Triangle is most definitely a physical marker of the type

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<sup>105</sup> In spite of the numerous references to sexuality in his writing, Lefebvre has surprisingly little to say about the relationship between different forms of sexuality and urban space (Blum and Nast, 1996). However, the framework which he has provided for understanding the social production of social space (as set out in Chapter Five) can be used to help understand these dynamics more closely.



of village that this is, i.e. a gay village, but it seems to have a deeper significance for some of the users of the scene: 'Well it's not *just* a flag is it? It's something which signifies a whole lot more to gay people, it's something that almost unites them and brings them together, it's like you're all on the same team all of a sudden' (Iven, pers. comm., 2005). The use of *just* highlights that there is much more to the rainbow flag than its physicality, it holds ideational and social meaning through its symbolism, something which undoubtedly impacts upon the socio-spatial practices facilitated there.

This relates to the way in which notions of public space are simultaneously constituted by a myriad of imaginary, social and practical elements. Mitchell (1994) proposes that the important issue for queer representation is not so much spaces as they exist, but the way that 'public spaces' are socially constructed. As discussed in Chapter Four, we need to remember that the social and the spatial are so highly imbued with each other's presence that their analytical separation quickly becomes a misleading exercise. Space is not simply formed and moulded, but plays an active role in the formation of society. We do not live in an abstract framework of geometric spatial relationships; we live in a world of meaning. However, because such meanings are socially constructed and produced, they are open to contestation. To challenge the normative meanings of space, and for many sexual strategies that aim to contest wider social relations, public expression has become the *sine qua non* of success; taking the body, publicly marked as different, as their principal form of power. This is something that became increasingly apparent on further inspection into the importance of queer identity formation and performance in the Pink Triangle.

### **6.2.3: The gay village and queer identity formation**

One of the central claims of the users of the Pink Triangle interviewed as part of this research was that there is a direct need for some kind of gay spatial and social scene in which non-normative sexual identities can be displayed and (re)created. Despite the private ownership of all of the venues that constitute the Pink Triangle, a number of respondents referred to their seemingly 'public



nature' as they became conceptualised as public spaces where the private non-heterosexual self could be on show to others and (re)produced through interactions with other members of the 'queer public'. Hubbard comments on the importance of escaping from the threat of the 'normal heterosexual' public realm making the observation that:

The metaphor of the closet can be seen as an appropriate description of the schizophrenic spatial lives of many gays, lesbians and bisexuals who are not 'out' in public spaces for fear that they will be victims of verbal or visual intimidation, and, at worst, 'gay bashing'.  
(2001: 56)

It is on the gay 'scene' that many queers seem to be able to drop their guard, forget about their day-to-day restraints and perform a queer identity. As noted by Castells:

Gays need a spatially defined community for a long period, where culture and power can be reformulated in a process of experimental social interaction and active political mobilisation. By virtue of an alternative lifestyle in a spatial sub-set of the urban system, a 'city' emerges within the city (not outside the existing city and not necessarily against other communities) in a process that transforms established cultural values and existing spatial forms. (1989: 139)

This idea of the need to have an alternative space in which to 'interact' with 'others' who are also 'othered' in 'normative public spaces' is essential to allow for individuals to embrace their often subordinate 'gay identity'. Time again the notion of 'acceptance' and the ability for 'exploration' were touted as two of the main attractions of the gay 'scene', making it a public arena which provided space for the circulation of marginalised private queer selves.

As with any of the multi-faceted aspects of identity, sexuality is something that can deeply affect how an individual perceives, identifies and represents themselves, and it can influence how they are perceived, identified and represented by others. In order for personal (read as private) development, it is essential for individuals to have the opportunity to mix (read as publicly) with other people who find themselves in similar circumstances to their own. This seems all the more important if individuals have limited access to the types of people that they identify themselves with e.g. marginal groups such as non-



heterosexuals using the facilities within the Pink Triangle. As argued by Katz, a space that facilitates such performances is essential as: 'Just as we can imagine spaces associated with, excluding or embracing particular identities, we can also see identity as spatially formed and enacted' (2005: 255). One of the things that was restated time again by the participants involved in this research was how it was *in* and *through* the space of the 'gay village' that their sexual identity was formed and enacted. As one respondent stated: 'it was on the scene that I actually learnt how to be gay, I mean without coming here how would I know how I needed to be to be attractive to other men?' (Frank, pers. comm., 2005).

Space is intertwined with both the *enactment* and *creation* of sexuality. Sexuality relies on space as not only terrain on, but also through which this enactment and creation can take place. As argued by Tonkiss:

Part of the task of looking at sexuality as a spatial fact is to think about how questions of identity help to shape urban spaces. This goes beyond treating sexuality merely as something that happens in space, to examining sexuality in terms of social relations and practices that themselves work to produce space. (2005: 96)

Whereas the Pink Triangle's 'public nature' was discussed as enabling the exploration of the 'private self', it was how the venues within the Pink Triangle incorporated a degree of 'privacy' through their general appeal to a specific 'gay community' or 'queer public' which allowed for certain types of sexualities to be produced in and productive of specific spatial practices. Attempting to understand the facilities provided in the Pink Triangle within a strict public/private dichotomy is impossible. Rather, there are relations of publicness and privacy available within the space, offering the users a multitude of different opportunities, as one respondent noted: 'The gay village enables me to escape the restraints of my home life and mix with other people like me who I can be myself in front of' (Emily, pers. comm., 2005). The Pink Triangle enables withdrawal from the restraints of everyday heteronormative space and the possibility of mixing with a non-heteronormative public.

Citizens create 'meaningful public space' by expressing their attitudes,



asserting their claims and using it for their own purposes (Goheen, 1998: 479). This came through in the primary research component of this thesis as the agency involved in the (re)creation and performance of the sexual identity of the Pink Triangle and its users became obvious. Looking to my field diary, I noted how:

It's astounding how important the scene seems to be for its young clientele who parade around the space in such a hyped fashion that you would think that this was the only place that they could be so flamboyant. One thing is for sure, the semi-naked men dancing on the podiums to Kylie Minogue in front of a gawping male audience has a definite 'queering' effect on this place.

(2005)

As Tonkiss argues: 'Spatial arrangements help to reproduce structures of gender and sexual difference, but also to articulate identities. Lines of social division and dominance are reinforced by urban environments, but individuals also find spaces in the city in which to perform or express difference' (2005: 94).

In Lefebvre's terms, the gay village becomes an alternative space of representation. To recap, these *lived* spaces are involved in: 'Combining the real and the imagined, things and thought on equal terms, or at least not privileging one over the other *a priori*, these lived spaces of representation are thus the terrain for the generation of 'counterspaces', spaces of resistance to the dominant order arising precisely from their subordinate, peripheral or marginalized positioning' (Soja, 1996: 68). Newcastle's Pink Triangle allows for the performance of non-normative sexualities, permitting the expression of alternative ways of being or alternative spatial practice. It would be difficult to find a semi-naked man dancing to Kylie Minogue's mega-mix in front of a largely gay male audience in any other of Newcastle's pub and club scenes.

However, the interviewees neither unanimously welcomed, nor considered *alternative*, the practices facilitated by the Pink Triangle. In fact, one of the users stated that:

When the gay village really wasn't a gay village, and consisted of a couple of grungy bars, the over-the-top behaviour that you find nowadays just didn't happen here. I mean to be honest it's a bit annoying this whole 'look at me' attitude of the younger



generation.

(Albert, pers. comm., 2005)

There was a consensus that as the gay village became increasingly established and better known, it became more like the commercially driven bars that you would find in Newcastle city centre - exactly the types of bars the gay village was originally set up in opposition to. The irony is that the greater public visibility of gay spaces (which in a sense reflects greater inclusion at a symbolic level) has gone hand in hand with the destruction of such spaces as 'Other spaces'. As Binnie states: 'They have now arguably 'become *same spaces*, integrated into the urban fabric and normalised' (2004: 168, emphasis in original). This is a long way from the supposed earlier role of gay venues, which served as the oppositional grounds in which political mobilisation of a marginal group could take place to facilitate the protests against their subordinate position as deprived 'sexual citizens' (Cooper, 1999).

### **6.3: Public space and the sexual citizen**

The way in which sexuality has been linked to notions of citizenship (for an overview see Bell and Binnie, 2000; Cooper, 1999) and debates around morality means that it is an area that deserves contemplation. As Chapters Two and Four argued, contemporary urban public space is often explicitly and/or implicitly tied to notions of citizenship. Public space is often envisioned as a platform for democracy, the space in the city that the true extent of citizenship can be measured. As discussed in the previous chapter, certain groups of queer citizens, notably those who embrace/d the queer politics movement, use/d the public spaces of the city - the very spaces which they were most excluded from - to protest against their exclusion. Whereas public space is often conceived as the space which harbours a great deal of exclusions, it has also served as a resource for the weak to challenge the norms of dominant groups through the tactical manipulation of space (De Certeau, 1984), engaging in transgressive (Cresswell, 1996), resistant and disruptive behaviour (Warner, 2002).

As an editor of one of the most influential books considering sexuality and



space, *Mapping Desire*, Bell was pioneering in his observation that:

The question of public and private spaces for citizenship has been one of the most contested aspects of citizenship theory. The tensions between the closet and outing, between private rights and public obligations, situate the citizen-pervert exactly on the slash of the public/private split, irreducible to either domain.  
(1995: 147)

The 'citizen-pervert' sits at the slash of the divide between 'normal' and 'abnormal' (Foucault, 1989), whereby the 'citizen-pervert' or the 'abnormal' is actually constitutive of the 'normal'. This social position of 'abnormality' also becomes spatialised, siting 'non-heterosexual' citizens outside the realm of public acceptability, simultaneously confiscating any rights to a private sexual life free from public criticism.

Extending this observation, this chapter argues that the 'citizen-pervert' i.e. the non-heterosexual citizen (who would be bracketed with all of the deviant 'unhealthy' and 'debauched' heterosexual citizens) not only sits 'exactly on the slash of the public/private split', but shows that the social spaces they find themselves in are 'irreducible to either domain'. As Knopp and Brown state, when trying to understand public space in the city:

A potentially and much more fruitful and empowering approach would be to re-examine the larger issues of human agency and creativity, their relationships to structures and institutions of power, and the multiple and fragile spatialities that characterise all of these.  
(2003: 412)

This demands a clearer examination of the opportunities provided through the spatiality of the 'scene' and its wider relation to the public spaces of the contemporary urban realm.

### **6.3.1: The de-politicisation of the Pink Triangle: Creating the gay ghetto?**

Many arguments circulate about the role of the queer 'scene' in the contemporary urban realm. They range from the celebratory belief that they provide an alternative safe-space for non-normative sexual citizens to live their queer lives; to the pessimistic belief that they still occupy marginal spaces within the contemporary city, demonstrating that queers are no more accepted



in 'normal' society now than they were years ago; and the sceptical belief that the only reason they have been able to flourish is so that underdeveloped areas of the city can be regenerated through maximising the potential of the pink pound. However, whereas all of these motivations acted as factors in the development of the Pink Triangle, the frequent claim that it has become like a gay ghetto reveals a lot about the dynamics operating within and activating this particular scene. Evaluating whether or not the Pink Triangle could be described as a gay ghetto, a social and spatial concentration of people with common concerns and problems regarding the wider public and their private lives, leads to an interesting discussion about how relations of publicness and privateness operate in multiple and sometimes contradictory ways within the scene.

In Davidson's estimation, the gay territory has failed in its mission of creating a 'liberated zone' and has become the 'gay ghetto', a symbol of 'isolation and continued oppression' (1994: 1). While his assessment of the effect on gay politics of the changing locus of political power in postmodern society is astute, he is overly pessimistic about the new role of the 'gay ghetto'. Although the early development of a local base for electoral power was a significant effect of the earlier claiming of urban territory by (specifically American) queers, most important, and continuing roles of these queer spaces have been social, emotional, cultural and symbolic, not overtly political. Nevertheless, as Hollands notes: 'That Newcastle's scene is politically apathetic in comparison to the scenes of London, Brighton, Manchester and the like is one of its most distinguishing features' (2001: 17).

The Pink Triangle has been host to severe criticism regarding the lack of political activity taking place within the area. Whilst carrying out this research, the most scathing attack was launched by *The Crack*, a magazine that actually normally actively promotes the Pink Triangle. It condemned Newcastle's decision to withdraw from 'National Gay Pride celebrations' and in an article bluntly titled 'There's no pride on the Tyne' (August, 2005), the bar owners and users of the Pink Triangle were accused of 'sitting on their laurels without giving



a damn about the fact that not everyone is able to escape from the pressure of a still homophobic society' (*The Crack*, August 2005). Whilst a number of the older participants commented on the lack of political activity in the Pink Triangle, specifically in relation to the demonstration for gay equality rights, the majority of the users interviewed were keener to point out the importance of the mere existence of the space. As a site of cultural resistance with enormous symbolic meaning for queers, the Pink Triangle provides cultural and emotional support through social facilities for a group comprised of an increasingly diverse and geographically scattered population, questionably called a 'community'.<sup>106</sup>

Arguments about the depoliticisation of the 'scene' hold resonance with the claims made in Chapter Four about the depoliticisation of public space more broadly. As Myslik states, over 20 years D'Emilio observed that, 'for gay men and lesbians, San Francisco has become akin to what Rome is for Catholics; a lot of us live there and many more make the pilgrimage' (1981: 77) and going on to argue:

I suggest that today queer spaces are for queers more akin to what Jerusalem is for Jews: most of us live somewhere else, our political power has moved elsewhere, but the cultural and emotional significance of this place cannot be overestimated.  
(1996: 28)

For Myslik and D'Emilio, the queer 'public' needs to neither function politically, nor be entirely spatially proximate to have a common value.

For those who choose to use it, the Pink Triangle represents, if not a physically liberated zone, a site of cultural resistance where one can overcome, though never ignore, the fear of public heterosexism and homophobia:

It doesn't matter to me that it [The Pink Triangle] is not a space for demonstrations and protests, I'm just relieved that there is somewhere that I can go where I'm not going to be criticised or thumped on the nose for being with my boyfriend.  
(Christopher, pers. comm., 2005)

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<sup>106</sup> There are a number of problems associated with calling such diverse users with such different needs and desires a 'community' (see Richardson et al., 2006). However, there is an acknowledgement that the reason why they are still called a community is because of some of their common concerns and their likely fate of a certain degree of exclusion from wider society.



The Pink Triangle combines some of the benefits commonly associated with public and private spaces. On the one hand, it allows for interaction with other members of the (queer) public; the coming together of people whose common concerns are often fundamentally different to the broader public; and a chance to publicly display and (re)construct their non-normative identity. On the other hand, it provides a space where the dominant norms of society can be evaded; there is a chance for intimate encounters with specific others; and space is provided for the (re)construction and contemplation of the private self. Nonetheless, it has been commonly argued that any challenge to dominance may originate on the margins, but it must enter the mainstream (on its own terms) to be effective (Cresswell, 1996; Rose, 2001).

To take this line of argument, the 'gay village' i.e. that which has often been characterised as the 'gay ghetto', directly challenges heteronormative ideals. However, it can only do this by entering (in both social-spatial practice and performance) into the mainstream to find true equality by being accepted into the wider public spaces of the cities, as opposed to being trapped into the private facilities of the gay villages. This argument has increased with the powerful critique being launched at the types of facilities being provided in gay villages such as the Pink Triangle. For example, Bell and Binnie argue that the key to the 'success' of the gay village has been the production of a 'de-sexualised consumption space where an asexual and non-threatening identity (especially to women) can be enacted' (2004: 1818).<sup>107</sup> This raises questions about whether or not 'gay villages' are becoming more like the capitalist abstract spaces that worried Lefebvre (1991): Are they eroding the opportunity to experience and practice difference in the contemporary urban realm, and if so what does this say about the 'publicness' of the space?

### **6.3.2: Desexualising sex publics: Cosmopolitanism, homonormativity and commodification**

Many critics are showing an increasing concern about how facilities provided for

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<sup>107</sup> For an alternative take on the politicisation of gay villages through partying as politics see Browne, 2006.



the queer community, such as those pubs and clubs within the Pink Triangle, are based around inherently exclusionary private spaces of consumption (for example, Binnie and Bell, 2004; Brown, 2004; Skeggs, 1999; Valentine, 2001). This was a concern from the outset of the development of the Pink Triangle, as the members of the 'gay community' involved in the community consultations, which set out the dominant representation of space for the area with NCC, were an elite group. It was a panel of queer entrepreneurs that liaised with NCC when the original concept for the area i.e. what facilities the area should provide, was being considered. The profit-driven agenda of the queer entrepreneurs meant that the types of facilities agreed upon - and the ones that are now available - are perhaps unsurprisingly all commercial premises.

Whereas most of the venues do not charge a direct entrance fee, inclusion into such spaces comes at the cost of being able to afford to buy into a particular lifestyle and access the services and products available within them. The commercial nature of the Pink Triangle has even been used to launch an attack at the fact that the area is called a 'village'. One respondent highlighted this vehemently and rhetorically stating:

Have you ever been to a village where absolutely everything is dependent on profit? I would guess not. This area is not a village at all, in fact even the thought of it being called that makes me laugh. Villages have residents for a start, communal facilities and non-profit ones at that. There's none of that here. This is no village, no village at all. (Brenda, pers. comm., 2005)

This thesis does not aim to discuss whether the Pink Triangle should be classed as a village, however, it is important to note that there is a dispute over what it is called in NCC's policies and the promotional literature of the owners (representations of space), and how it is perceived and lived by many of its users.

The way in which 'gay villages' are packaged under the neo-liberal political-economic agenda and the types of commercial spaces which are subsequently provided, chimes with a number of themes and issues raised in Chapter Four in relation to the trend towards the commodification of public space. As argued by Bell and Binnie (2004), anyone researching the 'gay villages' of western cities



must consider the extent to which the idea of sexual citizenship has been woven into the urban entrepreneurial agenda – like that promoted by New Labour - and how this affects sexualised spaces. They argue that: ‘The process is read as an instance of the new ‘homonormativity’, producing a global repertoire of themed gay villages, as cities throughout the world weave commodified gay space into their promotional campaigns’ (Bell and Binnie, 2004: 1807).

The production of what Lisa Duggan (2002) names ‘the new homonormativity’ is said to work to exclude ‘undesirable’ forms of sexual expression, including their expression in space, for example, by reducing the ‘gay public sphere’ to consumption spaces and ‘gentrified neighbourhoods only’ (Bell and Binnie, 2004). This is something which has obvious exclusionary consequences for those who cannot or do not feel comfortable in occupying these new spaces, and for the relationship between the users and space of the spatially separate ‘gay village’ and the users and space of the wider public spaces of the city. All of these consequences particularly concerned the older members of the queer community incorporated into this research, be it in relation to the de-politicisation of the Pink Triangle as discussed above, or the exclusionary nature of such spaces that will be discussed below.

Tracking the neo-liberal agenda in US gay politics, Duggan shows how the new homonormativity aims to produce:

A politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds them while promising the possibility of a demobilised gay constituency and a privatised, depoliticised gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption (Duggan, 2002: 179)

In terms of the production of space, Bell and Binnie argue that this ‘homonormativity’ formulation ‘maps perfectly onto the reshaping of gay villages’ and neighbourhoods under the entrepreneurial governance agenda within Britain (2004: 1818). Whilst one must be aware of the movement towards a new, increasingly assimilationist, and exclusionary homonormativity, after carrying out primary research in the Pink Triangle, such a sweeping



generalisation does not appear to hold true in all cases. As Bell and Binnie propose: 'The interweaving of urban governance and sexual citizenship agendas produces particular kinds of sexual spaces at the exclusion of others' (2004: 1807). However, it is important not to typify and stereotype gay consumption culture, and nightlife in particular, as a monolith (Buckland, 2002) and to accept that within it there are significant generational and gender differences and subject positions, not to mention 'huge variations in the provision of spaces for gay men and lesbians around the world' (Chatterton and Hollands, 2003: 149).<sup>108</sup>

Nevertheless, in current conflicts over sexualised urban space, political economic realities play a major part in determining the organisation of space (Binnie, 2000). This was continually alluded to by a number of the users of the Pink Triangle interviewed as part of this research: 'The gay spaces of Newcastle have changed, now they're all about the money' (Albert, pers. comm., 2005); 'Whereas the pubs and bars here might seem nicer, a lot of the atmosphere has been lost and a lot of people don't like these new trendy bars' (Denise, pers. comm., 2005), 'I wish that we could go back to the real gay bars that were actually different to the bars on the Bigg Market, these ones are now too mainstream' (Brenda, pers. comm., 2005). Whilst the commercial nature of the Pink Triangle disappointed many of the users of the space, its effects were also obviously more serious and far-reaching. The increasingly commercial and profit-driven nature of the venues within the Pink Triangle was a common theme that littered the transcripts from the interviews carried out; it was blamed for pricing less affluent queers out of the market.

For those who do not possess the capital, the ability to take up (and use) space in the Pink Triangle is constrained. This is a common theme within sexuality studies, as queer urban consumption spaces are commonly accused of being

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<sup>108</sup> Some of the lesbians interviewed were more likely to have informal private networks in which their sexual identity was (re)constructed and practiced. The older women especially commented upon how they felt more comfortable within the private realm of their homes and therefore were more likely to have social gatherings with a close-knit group rather than go to the more public facilities provided in the Pink Triangle. The expense of the products provided in the venues was often brought up as a deterrent for women, as some often felt tied to the realm of domesticity as they were priced out of the commercial market.



misrecognised as 'sites of untrammelled affluence' (Binnie, 2000: 167). Not having the financial capability seriously compromises one's ability to take up a space within the city. This is striking within the Pink Triangle, as the prices of drinks (on average 20% more expensive than similar venues in Newcastle) and club entry fees (50% more expensive than similar venues in Newcastle) are noticeably higher than the prices charged by their non-queer counterparts.<sup>109</sup> So while places such as the Pink Triangle are often seen as an enabler and facilitator of modern gay identities - in the sense of the creation of gay neighbourhoods, and commercial spaces, within global cities - such commercially driven venues can also 'confine, stifle, control gay identities' as identity is forged around consumption choices (Binnie, 2000: 171).

The focus on the consumer citizen must be complemented by a concern with notions of production, especially the production of space and the opportunities provided and created through such spaces. Rose (1999) has argued that consumption is now central to how citizenship, and overall identity, is defined. Here, 'the construction of our identities and the management and disciplining of the self occurs through choices we make as consumers' (Binnie and Bell, 2004: 189). Whilst it would be fair to argue that many contemporary identities, whether queer or heterosexual, are based around consumption choices, the concern is that an already marginalized group are feeling pressured to conform to stronger consumption drives - to buy into a queer identity which is more acceptable (to the general and queer public). Modern gay lifestyle is dominated by cosmopolitanism 'reflected both in a desire to live in the perceived centre of gay culture and commerce, and equally in a certain knowingness and sophistication' (Binnie, 2000: 71). However, the way in which individuals can buy into and access such 'knowingness and sophistication' is obviously diverse, as is the desirability of such a lifestyle in the first place.

The presence of gay communities and spaces has become part of the arsenal of entrepreneurial governance, giving sexual 'others' a central role in place

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<sup>109</sup> There is a literature commenting upon the way in which queer venues manipulate the marginality of their consumers by charging higher prices purely because they know queer venues are limited within the city (Bell and Valentine, 1995; Binnie and Skeggs, 2004; Casey, 2004).



promotion as symbols of cosmopolitanism and creative appeal (Bell and Binnie, 2004; Skeggs and Binnie, 2004). Yet this incorporation has meant tightening the regulation of the types of sexualised spaces in cities. As Bell and Binnie note: 'This 'sexual restructuring' of cities, we argue, is a powerful component of the 'new homonormativity', a broader ideological project tied to the logic of 'assimilationist sexual citizenship' (2004: 1818). Related to this is the fact that the new publicness of more mainstream manifestations of gay consumer cultures - thoroughfares, street cafes, trendy bars, themed gay villages - has driven the less-assimilated queers underground, back to subterranean, back-street bars and cruising grounds (Califa, 1994).

From the research generated as part of this thesis, it is possible to note how the cosmopolitanism activating gay villages actually perpetuates discriminations of its own. As revealed by one of the respondents:

To be here [Pink Triangle] you have to have money, a certain look about you and the right clothes....and it helps if you are young. I mean it's not as if people would say anything nasty to you, but you would probably feel like what am I doing here.<sup>110</sup>

(Shauna, pers. comm., 2005)

The cosmopolitanism articulated in and through the Pink Triangle actively made some of the users feel intimidated and unwelcome. The Pink Triangle was portrayed as a space that operated around a particular understanding of who was to be welcomed into the 'gay public' and the types of people that should be relegated further to the margins. Such accusations were directly related to the underlying political-economic structure providing the commercial facilities to be found within the Pink Triangle. As opposed to being in a position where 'use value, subordinated for centuries to exchange value, can now come first again' (Lefebvre, 1991: 17), within the Pink Triangle, exchange value seemed to be at a premium. However, space is always open to contestation and renegotiation so whereas the neo-liberal agenda may have provided more sanitised spaces in

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<sup>110</sup> Whilst conducting ethnographic research in the Pink Triangle, I was approached by a number of 'butch' lesbians who questioned why a 'girl like me' was in a 'place like this'? This not only raised issues about my positionality within the research process and how my perceived heterosexuality would influence the data generated, but also made me question some of the normative assumptions about who was welcomed into these 'queer' spaces, by whom and on what terms.



the city, the users of those spaces need not always conform to the expected uses of that space or even use that space at all.

#### **6.4: Contrived public spaces: Contrived public identities**

One of the common complaints about the Pink Triangle was 'its lack of diversity in the facilities it provides' (Emily, pers. comm., 2005) as participants commented that 'there are no late night cafes' (Julia, pers. comm., 2005) and asked 'what if you just want to go for a quiet drink? There's nowhere to go'; 'what if you don't drink?' (Frank, pers. comm., 2005). Whereas some of the pubs, such as The Eagle and The End (formerly Rockies), are perceived as being 'more chilled out', 'more relaxed' and simultaneously less 'flamboyant' and 'in your face', Newcastle's scene was consistently described by its users as a place of 'limited opportunity, especially for older, quieter and less trendy queers' (Albert, pers. comm., 2005). Some of the interviewees articulated that they felt as though they had to 'perform a more contrived identity' in the gay village in order to seek approval from other members of the gay community or queer public occupying this space.

The way in which queers are marginalised in the everyday spaces of the city and often taunted by members of the broader (heterosexual) city public, even being at risk of physical assault and verbal harassment, means that acceptance into the 'queer public' holds increased significance. However, perhaps unsurprisingly, the users of Newcastle's scene were often as discriminatory as their heterosexual counterparts - the only difference being the criteria upon which their discriminations were built. In order to be accepted into the gay community, it became obvious that a certain degree of sophistication - more broadly termed cosmopolitanism - was desired, if not essential. Speaking directly to the discourse of cosmopolitanism within queer scenes, Skeggs and Binnie write that:

We argue that the term cosmopolitanism is useful in helping understand the unease and discomfort with being an appropriate or 'proper' user of the space, which requires a fixity of identity, a possession of the right personae to pass through and occupy the space. (2004: 39)



This was echoed in the opinions of the interviewees incorporated into this research, as they commented that in order to fit in to the gay scene they had to be 'wearing the correct clothes'; 'having the newest style haircut'; and, 'drinking the right drink' (Grace, pers. comm., 2005).

As Bourdieu (1979, 1986, 1987, 1989) notes, the way we move through social space with different types of capital (cultural, social, symbolic and economic) enables us to embody different types of capitals. Taking this as their point of departure, Skeggs and Binnie argue that 'social class is made up of this embodied combination, lived and carried on the body, displayed through dispositions such as access, entitlement and occupation of space' (2004: 45). The different levels of social class held, or perceived to be exhibited, by the users of the Pink Triangle alter their relationship to the other users of the scene, and their initial ability to fully access the service provided in the venues. As Skeggs and Binnie assert:

'...behind and within the articulation for the fluidity of identity associated with the term cosmopolitanism, the rigidities of class and lesbian and gay identity are reproduced. In particular, class entitlement plays a major role in articulating *and* enabling who can be included and excluded from this space.' (2004: 40)

As with any space, the Pink Triangle is structured around clear visions of what would be accepted and or desired by the hegemonic group within the area, in this case arguably an increasingly homonormative 'queer community'. One of the bar tenders in Twist noted that:

When people come here they want to be accepted by the other gay people and in order to do this they have to make themselves attractive and look the part, I mean you can't come here in your leathers or as a big butch dyke if you want to score.  
(Carlos, pers. comm., 2005)

The way in which people's social capital would be marked on their body, through the clothes they wore, the confidence they exuded or lacked, their perceived level of attractiveness and what they were doing on the scene would dramatically affect their ability to navigate the scene, and the ease at which they could become accepted into the 'queer public'.

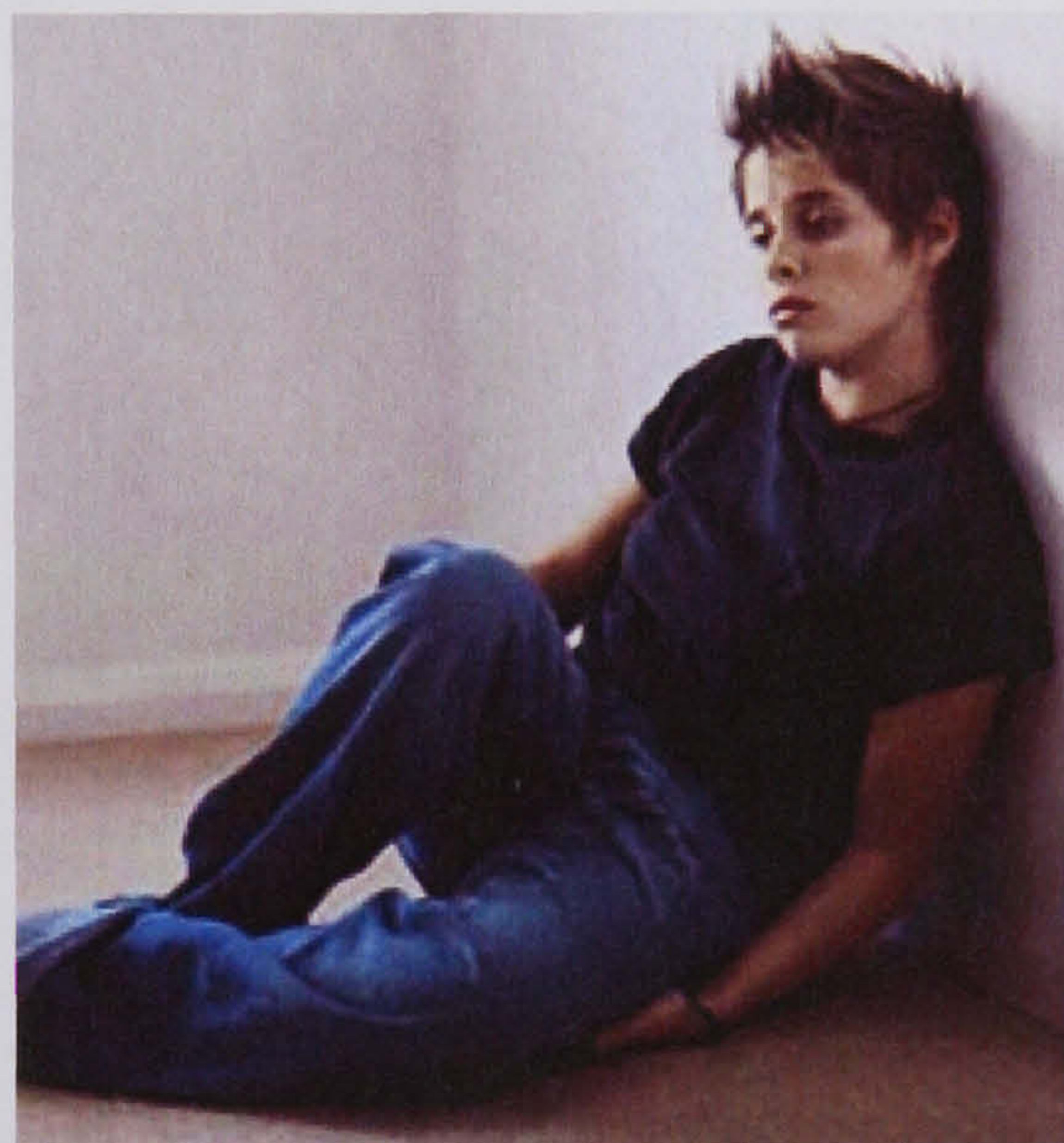


Whilst carrying out participant observation on the scene, I noted in my field diary how:

There appears to be a very definite way in which the people here dress. I have never seen so many Alex Parks (lesbian icon) (**see Figure 6.4**) haircuts and so much Bench and Triple S clothing in one place. The majority of people in here seem to be so over-styled. (2005)

The Pink Triangle seems to be a place of emulation where very specific gay identities are forged in a fashion that mimics the icons of the gay community. The impact of gay icons such as Alex Parks, David Beckham and Pink on the styles of the younger participants in the scene is phenomenal, illustrating how public notions of what is deemed sexually attractive circulate in the space of the scene to the same extent as they do in the everyday public spaces of the city.

**Figure 6.4: Lesbian Icon Alex Parks**



The new and highly sanitised venues of the Pink Triangle, 'where the music is played too loud to hold a conversation and everyone is on the pull' (Denise, pers. comm., 2005), despite being highly sexually charged, have almost successfully eradicated sex from this area of the city. An older interviewee recalled that: 'long gone are the days where there is as much celebration of our sexuality taking place in the back streets of the Pink Triangle as there is inside the premises, I mean public sex in Newcastle is now pretty much confined to the cruising zones' (Albert, pers. comm., 2005). In sum, the increased visibility of lesbians and gay men within the commercial heart of Newcastle,



paradoxically, only serves to reinforce the marginalisation of public sex. The benefits of publicness which circulate within and are enabled and facilitated through the venues in the Pink Triangle often come at the cost of conformity to new homonormative ways of being as some (undesirable) private tastes are excluded.

#### **6.4.1: 'This is not my scene': the limits to the attraction and accessibility of the scene**

A number of the users of the Pink Triangle appear to *perform* 'a cosmopolitan gay identity' rather effortlessly, aiding the circulation of such a publicly desired 'sophisticated and knowing' queer identity. Albert noted this saying, almost with a hint of jealousy: 'Just watch the younger ones parading around in their designer kit, drinking their fancy drinks with such confidence' (pers. comm., 2005). However, a number of interviewees mentioned how many of their gay friends would refuse to go to the scene because of the limits to the attraction and accessibility of the facilities provided. Indeed, many of the users had some harsh criticisms of their own to make.

The kinds of facilities provided within the Pink Triangle seemed to be considered discriminatory on a number of levels, with the clearest discriminations being in terms of age, gender and socio-economic group. As discussed above, the prices of the drinks in the pubs and clubs, and the entrance fees to the nightclubs within the Pink Triangle are a lot higher than other bars in Newcastle city centre. The expense of occupying the village means that a number of people are priced out of the market: 'There is no way that I could afford to go out drinking regularly on the scene and even if I did I wouldn't feel comfortable as I sure as hell couldn't afford the kit [clothing] that I would need to fit in' (Denise, pers. comm., 2005). However, whilst this exclusion was 'easy enough to combat', through the use of spatial tactics (De Certeau, 1984), for example, 'by drinking soft drinks as opposed to alcoholic drinks', 'taking advantage of special drink promotions' or subverting the commercial nature of the space by 'taking your own alcohol into the venues' (Christopher, pers. comm., 2005) some exclusions proved more difficult to



overcome. The conspicuous consumption culture, which seemed to underlie the dynamics of the space, was in itself enough to put some of the less affluent members of the queer community off due to their inability and/or lack of desire to buy into this kind of lifestyle.

A number of older queers interviewed as part of this research felt that the depoliticisation of the space and its transformation into a commercial village was unattractive enough, but there were even more problems:

This place just isn't what it used to be. I mean everyone here either seems to be here to find a shag, or flaunt it. Some of the youngsters seem to be as fake as the wooden floors and as poncy as the furniture. I can't even go out for a quiet drink because the music's so loud and the lighting's so dark it's disturbing. Now I will only ever go to Rockies or Yard.

(Brenda, pers. comm., 2005)

The 'hyped up' and 'image conscious' nature of the younger users of certain venues (Twist, Switch and Heavens Above in particular) was enough to put off some of the older members of the queer community from using them. However, the hedonistic atmosphere, found within certain bars, was only part of the problem. A number of the users of the scene described many venues as 'artificial' or 'cheesy', places which would hold very little attraction, if any, for a large number of people. Several of the older queer clientele disclosed that they would frequent the 'more relaxed' and 'chilled out' venues on the scene, notably The Yard, The End and The Eagle, however, these venues also proved to have their own exclusions.

The Pink Triangle is policed around a gender divide. In a number of bars, certain groups within the queer community are made to feel unwelcome. To give an example of this, when interviewing Albert about his use, opinion and experience of the Pink Triangle, he mentioned that the bar that he went to most often was The Eagle. I had at this point never been into the Eagle so I asked him if he wanted to go for a drink in there after the interview. His reply surprised me:

There is no way that I would be able to take you into the Eagle. It's a man's only bar, well there's no written law but it is for men only. If I took you in there you would be made to feel so



uncomfortable, they [the other clientele] would no doubt shout abuse at you. And, well as for me that would be my last time in there too as they wouldn't speak to me after that.

(pers. comm., 2005)

A number of the interviewees echoed this sentiment, reinforcing the point that despite being marketed as a 'gay village for the gay community', the space(s) of the gay village is not always accessible to all.

The 'gay community', like any 'community', is a heterogeneous group made up of a diverse range of people each with their own opinions, beliefs, desires and personal situations (Warner, 2002). However, the way in which the social differences between the diverse queer user groups of the Pink Triangle have led to different spatialisations warrants comment. The factions within the queer community of Newcastle's Pink Triangle have led to different venues essentially being popular with specific groups. The level of animosity between groups within the 'queer public' has actually inspired spatial separation of particular sub-groups. For example, the informants noted that, 'Twist is the most popular bar for trannies' (Helen, pers. comm., 2005); 'The Dog is really for lesbians' (Julia, pers. comm., 2005) and 'you only really see gay men in the Eagle, that's our space' (Frank, pers. comm., 2005). The animosity between gay men and lesbians is noted as considerable within queer studies and often overstated, but it is interesting to note how different groups use the scene in Newcastle. More significantly, in relation to this research, each with their own discriminations and prejudices, which were more often than not played through everyday spatial and social encounters – or attempts to avoid such encounters. The social or anti-social behaviour of certain members of the gay community was enough to discourage certain potential users from this space, but even the spatial outlay of the space discouraged other users.

### **6.5: The role of urban design in the Pink Triangle**

As argued in Chapter Five in relation to the importance of *representations of space* and the way in which space is conceived, most notably through the space of urban planners and designers, any understanding of public space must consider the way in which it has been designed and its subsequent built



form (spatial practice). How the CfL area was conceived through design and the subsequent materiality of the space has a direct bearing on the way in which notions of publicness and privacy circulate within the space. This section considers the way in which notions of 'privacy' and 'publicness' are manifested into the design and building of the CfL area by exploring the multiple ways in which one of these relations is considered more important and designed into the physicality of the space in the hope of inspiring its preferred social relation.

Whereas I do not subscribe to the notion of environmental determinism (see Chapter Two), and ultimately go on to argue for a more fluid notion of the social construction of space, as discussed in Chapters Four and Five, this chapter argues that the materiality of space contributes to the production of space as 'public'. This has a very specific history within the realm of sexuality studies, as highlighted by Binnie: 'In any examination of how sexualities are produced in space, it is dangerous to neglect the material' (1995: 199). Within the CfL area, spaces have been designed and built, using specific design mechanisms, to conform to the alternative ideals of publicness and privacy. In this case, it is possible to see why it is helpful to consider 'public' and 'private' as relations which are sometimes considered as spatialised, specifically in the realm of urban design where it is commonly believed that space can be designed and then built as public/private – even though this is not always the case in practice. Whilst there appears to be a broader system of the types of 'life' that have been designed into certain parts of the CfL area, and certain types of 'life' that have been designed out of the CfL, the way in which space is actually used contests such aspirations and ideals.

### **6.5.1: Designing life out of Times Square**

One of the key observations made in the Pink Triangle whilst carrying out everyday ethnography was that the area is not at all conducive to public lingering and is aesthetically unpleasing. It is very different from CABE's vision of public space as a place where we can all 'relax and enjoy spending time together' (2005). The space is very grey and is like a wind tunnel as the southwesterly winds sweep across the Tyne River and up and through Times



Square, the design of the buildings channelling the cold winds across the largely empty square. NCC's Head Town Planner described this as 'something that makes Times Square a very poorly designed public space...I mean who would want to sit in a wind tunnel to eat their sandwiches?' (Howe, pers. comm., 2005). The poor design of the space is further evident in the fact that there are no purpose built public resting spots or public seating, with the only place to sit being either in one of the bars or on a small wall just outside the CfL. When questioning the Head Planner involved in the design of this space, he suggested that the reason for this was because the Council and commercial developers endorsed CABA's guidance that targeted the removal of marginal groups that depended on such provisions.

The west end of the city and the previously marginal location of the Pink Triangle had historically been home to a number of 'undesirable' and marginal groups. One of NCC's members stated that: 'this area used to be a lot less salubrious, I mean there were a lot of homeless people living there and a number of drug users, the kinds of people that threaten the general public' (anonymous, pers. comm., 2005). Therefore, through the design plans for the CfL area (representations of space) and the lack of public facilities provided, it was anticipated and hoped that less desirable groups would be designed out of the space. As discussed in Chapter Two, how marginal groups are being actively designed out of the public spaces of the city has obvious consequences for the nature of the 'public' incorporated into the designs and buildings of the contemporary urban realm, and the broader exclusionary city public more generally. Design intentions directly affect the *lived* dimension of spaces by influencing just how *liveable* spaces are for different users.

However, that Times Square has been so poorly designed means that it is not only the groups that were intentionally designed out of the space that are repelled from using this area. Time again, interviewees stated that they would only ever use the open (more traditional) public space of Times Square for activities such as Shindig's outdoor birthday party, the Ladyboys of Bangkok performances, screenings of sporting events such as the World Cup and the



annual ice skating provided by CfL. Again, all of the events and activities for which Times Square was popular were commercial ventures, showing the way in which the public's use of this 'public space' would be reliant upon their choices and accessibility as consumers. Other than the daily hum-drum of passing commuters, and the moving around of people into and out of the venues provided in the CfL area, this space was normally empty.

There is a distinct temporality to the use of Times Square, which revolves around working hours as people walk across it to, and from work, the large events at the nearby Telewest arena as thousands march through the square to go to see their chosen music artist, and the sporadic mega-events staged in Times Square. In general, it would perhaps be best thought of as a transient space for the general public, who simply move through it on their way to specified destinations. If, as argued by CABE, 'public spaces become successful when they become a destination in their own right' (2005: 2), then Times Square repeatedly fails. What is perhaps more concerning is that at the local level, very little is being done to rectify this situation as one of NCC's Town Planners disclosed: 'We really just accept that as a bad public space, there is little than we can do about it now. We need to learn from our mistake and move on' (anonymous, pers. comm., 2006). As discussed in Chapter Two, spaces like Times Square can become a missed opportunity because of the lack of clarity about which division within the local authority, if any, takes responsibility for often underperforming public spaces once they have been built.

One of the design mechanisms that has been successful is the design of private access areas to the medical laboratories at the back of the CfL area. The entrances to the medical facilities in the CfL are located at the opposite side of the CfL to the public space of Times Square. According to the Chief Executive of CfL:

The way the building is designed is of paramount importance for the entire enterprise. We have a large public access area to the public facilities provided in LIFE and a much more private set of entrances to the back of the building where people who come here with very personal conditions can enter without being worried about being. (Balls, pers. comm., 2005)



Whether the space is considered to be for ‘public’ or ‘private’ use has directly influenced the way buildings have been designed. However, as noted by the lack of use of Times Square, the way a space is designed for its *intended uses* does not always correlate with how the space *is used*, or in the case of Times Square, particularly underused. In the Lefebvrian scheme of thought, as developed in the previous chapter, it is fair to say that the way in which space is conceived as a *representation of spaces*, does not always equate to the way in which a space is lived by its multiple users through the *spaces of representation*. Rather, in order to understand the dynamics and processes at work in, through and across space, the way in which space is conceived, perceived and lived by its various stakeholders must be considered, and this means that the ways in which space is designed, used, regulated and managed all need to be considered in their complex and changing interrelation.

### 6.5.2: Designing life into Times Square

The design and building of the CfL area can be accused of attempting to design out specific uses and practices (and therefore users). However, how the facilities provided for the ‘queer community’ are designed in this area can be said to be attempting to design *in* very specific forms of public life. The facilities provided in the Pink Triangle are enclosed behind huge plate glass windows (**see Figures 6.5.2**). According to Skeggs, the way in which new queer venues are fronted by such high exposure windows as opposed to hidden away like they were previously highlights how: ‘The architectural design represents a queer visual statement: ‘We’re here; we’re queer...so get used to it’. It is a brick and mortar refusal to hide anymore, to remain underground and invisible’ (1999: 221). If the design of the buildings is a ‘refusal to hide anymore’, it is a demand that the queer users of such venues should not be entirely relegated to the realm of the ‘private’ and instead should be able to enter into ‘public’ view.



Figure 6.5.2: Bars in the Pink Triangle



The plated glass windows have inspired diverse reactions from the users of the venues. As one respondent noted: 'I love the way in which we can be seen being out in public, the windows allow people to see what is going on and to know that we are no longer made to feel ashamed' (Emily, pers. comm., 2005). For some, the design actually provided a window of opportunity in which 'we can display our gay selves to the outside world' (Christopher, pers. comm., 2005). For others, the huge plate glass windows detracted from the privacy that previous, more discrete venues had enabled. One respondent noted: 'I feel as if I'm in a goldfish bowl and everyone can come and stare at the gay people' (Brenda, pers. comm., 2005). Others supported this accusation, for example: 'I just want to go out for a drink with my mates, we're not some sort of spectacle, I mean now some of us are worried about being seen by people who don't know we're gay' (Denise, pers. comm., 2005). In general, the stage people were at in the 'coming out' process, and their desire for the respect of 'privacy', altered their opinion on the increasingly 'public' nature of the gay venues in the Pink



Triangle. Those who were completely out felt a lot more comfortable at being on view to the larger public, and those who were only out 'on the scene' felt slightly nervous and inhibited due to the openness of the windows.

There were differing opinions about whether the more 'confident, open and light' bars provided in the Pink Triangle were the kinds of venues that catered adequately for the queer community and this often seemed to be based around a generational divide. As argued by Short:

What is really going on, is that the gay scene is adapting to meet the needs of a generation who are more 'out' than their predecessors - an increasingly confident generation of lesbians and gay men whose sense of pride means that they want to be visible and not ignored. (1993: 16)

However, the way spaces were designed was not the only barriers to the older generation of the Pink Triangle; the social nature of the bars were also often criticised by older members of the community as has been discussed above. So, in order to begin to understand how space is produced and constructed as 'public', the spatial practices and the activities that they enable and encourage must be considered alongside how accessible and desirable such uses are for different users in the first instance.

## **6.6: A space of negotiation and contestation or the movement towards time-space regulation?**

Whilst much of the literature focussing on the queer movement points to the way public space is a constant site of struggle, a space of everyday (re)negotiation and contestation, the primary set of relations within the Pink Triangle are based around unsaid spatio-temporal negotiations. Whereas there are obviously two villages working in close proximity to one another, the area seems to function around very distinct spatio-temporal frameworks that allow the two villages to work almost harmoniously as separate entities. Alongside the construction of the science village and the extension in the provision of queer services, there appeared to be a naturally occurring temporal divide influencing which members of the public would be using this space at what times. In the CfL, you could almost write a timetable for when the space could



be classed as 'gay' and when it could be classed as 'science related'. Whereas lunchtime in the CfL sees trade coming from families visiting the CfL, workers from nearby offices and tourists on their way to the train station from one of the nearby hotels, the evening seems to be dominated by queer users. In my field diary, I noted how:

It's unbelievable how different the CfL area is depending on the time of day it is. During the daytime the venues seem to have a couple of families or straight couples in for lunch, or perhaps a couple of businessmen, but come 7pm it's all change. At 7pm, the clientele is predominantly queer. (2005)

There is a noticeable 7pm watershed when venues within the Pink Triangle start to cater for a queer clientele and the medical facilities, the centre for entertainment and science research laboratories have closed. Within some of the bars in the Pink Triangle, for example Twist and Switch, the gay paraphernalia, including posters advertising queer related events, queer public health services, free condoms and sexual health advice leaflets are only displayed after 7pm. At around this time, the lights within the venues often dim, the music gets louder and more 'camp' and the clientele become noticeably 'queerer'. The circulation of entities such as the posters, advice, music, and bodies coalesce to (re)produce the feeling of a 'queer space', in a sense (re)creating the queer public which it serves through the activities, experiences and practices it enables. This is also the case on Sunday afternoons, but less so on Saturdays when: 'Magpie [Newcastle United Football Club] fans descend onto the scene without any idea that they are in a gay bar...In fact, if they knew they probably wouldn't come in...unless they were looking for a fight' (Iven, pers. comm., 2005).

Whilst the football fans are seen as a threat to many users of the Pink Triangle, the relatively short duration of time that they frequent the venues means that they are easily avoided by queer users who negotiate the venues around the timing of Newcastle's home games. However, another group of users, who have been increasingly frequenting the scene, are heterosexual women, most notably hen parties. There is a growing concern that the invasion of the Pink Triangle by heterosexual women, who have been noted to come to such areas



for safety (Skeggs, 1999 writing on Manchester's Canal Street) and spectacle (Casey, 2005), is threatening the very queerness of 'gay villages'. Casey argues that: 'The presence of heterosexual women in spaces in which lesbians already experience limited tolerance by gay males is creating new safety, comfort and visibility issues for lesbians *and* some gay men' (2004: 455, emphasis in original). This was echoed in this research as a number of users commented upon the 'unsettling' 'concerning' and even 'annoying' presence of large groups of heterosexual women who 'all of a sudden seemed to think that it was cool to jump on the cosmopolitan bandwagon' (Grace, pers. comm., 2005).

The motivations of the large groups of women using the Pink Triangle are not of specific interest to this research, but their effect on the area is. Their presence is thought to have a diluting effect on the 'queerness' of the area, as a number of the users feel like they have to 'control their sexual behaviour in front of an audience who come to gawp at the spectacle of the gays' (Grace, pers. comm., 2005). Some users even commented that: 'if I see a large group of women [on a hen night] walk into the pub all dressed up in their veil and plastic penises I just walk straight out' (Denise, pers. comm., 2005). Many of the 'queer' women found the display of - or allusion to - overtly heterosexual practices offensive with one claiming 'Oh it would be different if we went into their space covered in lesbian sex toys wouldn't it' (Brenda, pers. comm., 2005). The underlying argument of the users of the Pink Triangle was that this was one of the few areas no longer under the restraint of the heteronormative gaze and that any such gaze was very unwelcome. The general sentiment was that there were different public spaces in the city that could be defined topographically as *their* (heterosexual) public space and *our* (queer) space, and that until both user groups could enter each other's space on their own terms they must exist separately.

Throughout this research, there were several changes to the area which have inspired further concerns about the way in which the 'scene' is becoming increasingly invaded by heterosexuals. The movement of Newcastle's main gay club - The Powerhouse - to the edge of the gay village saw its previous



venue playing host to some of Newcastle's most popular clubbing nights in what is now called Digital, including Stone Love and Shindig. The spatial proximity of Digital to the main bars within the Pink Triangle and the commercially opportunistic turn around in some of the venues' marketing campaigns, e.g. the Baron and Baroness which marketed itself as a 'mixed venue', struck an anxious chord in a lot of the users of the 'gay village'.

At present, the anxiety and worry seems to be somewhat overstated, as the venues are repeatedly packed out with 'queer' users and the space seems to remain a gay space. However, with the development of the City Quadrant area and the plan to open up the west of Newcastle's city centre even further through a multi-million pound Science city development, it will be interesting to see what happens in this space. For now, the main observation remains, Bell et al. (1994) were justified in arguing that space is both gendered and sexed and that sex and gender are spaced. The way in which this interrelation occurs is through the circulation of sexually specific practices in space, depending on the types of practices facilitated through the given spatialities. Therefore, due to the socially constructed nature of social space, the relationship between sexuality and space needs to be understood as constantly (re)created and not always already existing.

### **6.6.1: The Pink Triangle: A counterpublic for the gay community?**

Due to the marginal status occupied by gay villages (and their users) within the contemporary urban realm, attempts have been made to conceptualise how such spaces can be understood. The social and spatial separateness of these venues from the more mainstream spaces of cities has witnessed the conceptualisation of such spaces as 'counterpublics'. Fraser notes that: 'members of subordinate groups – e.g. gays and lesbians - have found it repeatedly advantageous to constitute alternative publics' (1992: 117). These 'subaltern counterpublics' are viewed as arenas in which the socially and spatially excluded members of society can come together and create their own life worlds, spaces that are suited to their individual needs: 'Parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinate social groups invent and circulate



counter discourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests and needs' (Fraser, 1992: 118).

The concept of the 'counterpublic' is helpful for understanding the Pink Triangle - which acts as an 'alternative public' to the commonplace heterosexually dominated spaces of the city (i.e. the everywhere else). The Pink Triangle, like the concept of counterpublic, marks itself against not just a wider or general public, but also a dominant one i.e. the heterosexual public. It therefore maintains, at least at some level, conscious or not, an awareness of its subordinate status. As discussed above, within it, users often generate 'oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests and needs' than those tolerated in broader society. However, a hierarchy of stigma is the assumed background of practice, affecting why people actually use the space, and what they actually do in those spaces. As noted above, the display of affection and sexual intimacy within the Pink Triangle was considered to produce a sexually charged atmosphere. Such actions have been explained in relation to the relatively liberatory potential of the Pink Triangle for users whose public expressions of affection are generally repressed (Bell, 1995). Unfortunately, such 'hidden' actions do very little to challenge the prejudices and discriminations of broader society, and instead reassert the non-normative status of queer sexuality.

Counterpublics are 'counter' to the extent that they try to supply different ways of imagining stranger-sociability and its reflexivity; as publics, they remain orientated to stranger-circulation in a way that is not just strategic, but also constitutive of membership. Like all publics, counterpublics come into being through an infinite address to strangers. However, counterpublic discourse addresses strangers that are socially marked by their participation in a specific type of performance. In relation to the Pink Triangle, this 'discourse' is the desire and practice of 'queer' sexuality. The formation of counterpublic norms of dialogue and co-presence is a fundamentally spatial process. As Ruddick argues: 'Public spaces serve not simply to surface pre-given behaviours, but become an active medium through which new identities are created and



contested' (1996: 135). It is partly through the circulations of bodies, knowledge and practices that the sexual identities which appear to be displayed in the Pink Triangle are actually (re)created and (re)produced.

Public space, then, is perhaps best not understood as a universally political space, but rather as 'the structured setting where cultural and ideological contest among a variety of publics takes place (Eley, 1992: 306). Iveson argues that from this perspective, struggles over the terms on which people access public space can be understood as struggles between a variety of publics over the meanings of 'publicness', rather than struggles over inclusion in *the* public. He promotes a comprehensive view of the creation of such spaces as counterpublics, insightfully stating that: 'I would certainly agree that the construction and defence of fixed spaces of withdrawal is not the only or the best way to protect alternative forms of publicness' (2003: 210). As the final chapter of this thesis will argue, however, there is no reason to think that attempts to manage a threat by externalising it cannot co-exist with attempts to create more open public space (Iveson, 2007).

## 6.7: Conclusion

This chapter has argued that the relationship between sexuality and space is particularly illuminating when investigating the role of the public/private distinction in structuring contemporary urban space. Sexual identities have been shown to be commonly policed around the social norms permeating any given space, defining that space as part of the hegemonic heterosexual public or that of subordinate alternative queer public. The pervasiveness of heterosexuality has allowed it to be falsely masqueraded as a natural and universally attractive sexual identity. The way in which this naturalisation is (re)produced spatially through repetitive and regular practices has been illustrated through the way in which users of the Pink Triangle alter their behaviours depending on their interpretations of the material, symbolic and ideational meanings of the different spaces of the city. The bodily performance of queer citizens has been discussed in relation to its potential to reinscribe and/or challenge the dominant discourse constituting any given space.



The liberatory potential of gay villages has been described, alongside the limitations of such socially and spatially separate entities. Despite providing a site where queer sexual identities can be enacted and (re)produced, the Pink Triangle is actually rather stifling for certain groups such as older and less affluent queers. In fact, the extent to which such a highly commodified and exclusionary space can be classed as an openly accessible public space is extremely contentious. Just like most other public spaces of the contemporary urban realm, the Pink Triangle (re)articulates a very specific vision of the types of groups welcomed into its public. The cosmopolitan identity of such a space circulates very particular ideas, knowledges and practices, constituting how its public is enacted. The restrictive nature of this cosmopolitan landscape and its associated public can actually be classed as a counter-public.

The potential of the Pink Triangle to be conceptualised as a counterpublic has been explored in this chapter. Highlighting the relatively subordinate status of the groups involved in its production, the way in which such status has resulted in a separate spatial and social scene has been clearly documented. What is particularly significant to this overall thesis is the way in which such alternative spatial realms act as a withdrawal from the more general public spaces of the city. It is questioned to what extent the users of such spaces can actually participate in and be included in the everyday spaces and the activities of the broader city public. Whether or not it is important for all members of the public to be welcomed into all of the public spaces of the city is something which has been introduced, but which deserves further discussion.

The following chapter will develop the debate around whether or not all members of the public ought to be included in visions of 'publicness' and the activities of public space in order for the space to be deemed public. Again, examining the way in which a very particular space – the BALTIC contemporary art centre in Gateshead - is designed, managed, regulated and used, the extent to which it functions as a public space will be examined. By considering the physical, ideational and symbolic dimensions of the BALTIC, alongside its activities programme, the theoretical insights developed through the thesis will



be further elaborated. In essence, the importance of carrying out empirical research and incorporating any associated insights is essential in developing a spatial framework through which contemporary public space can be understood and accounted for.



## Chapter 7

### BALTIC Contemporary art factory: A contrived space for the few not the many?

#### Figure 7: A vignette from my research diary

**Location:** Baltic Square steps (to the right of BALTIC as you look at it)

**Date:** Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> August 2005

**Time:** 9am -10am

#### Account snapshot:

*I am sitting on the steps directly to the right of BALTIC Square. This location gives me an excellent overview of the entire area of the large, open and breezy square. You can see the shadow of the ever-imposing grain silo cast across the expensive and durable flag stones that lead up to the art factory. Today it is warm and for a week day the square is very busy with people coming and going from B (at least 50 in the past hour). Again, the morning brings plenty of middle aged folks to the gallery. Some of the visitors arrive on foot, predominantly by crossing over the Millennium Bridge. Other larger groups (15-20 people) arrive on coaches, some of which are from out with the local area – 'David's of Derby' reads one coach sign. Whilst some visitors stand/linger outside of B – to take photos of the building, meet an acquaintance, or have a cigarette etc - others walk speedily across the square, seemingly paying scant attention to the building itself (perhaps regulars) and moving straight into the foyer of the building to collect information about the exhibition (Kienholz). I can see that the Level 1 cafe is already quite busy with gallery-goers and men in suits (presumably from local offices) taking in a caffeine fix. The cafe really does offer fantastic views along the Tyne, and is the most affordable place to have a drink in B.*

*It is interesting that most of the people in the square (excluding the regular ice-cream van man and the busker) enter into B at one point or another. The square is not really used by people that are not visiting the gallery. However, that could be because of the location of the site – it appears to be more of a destination space. The most popular destination within B (viewing tower) is again very busy, with people taking photos along the Quayside. (Interjection) That is rather amusing – two local elderly ladies walk past me talking about the Kienholz exhibition: 'Wonderful, beautiful, fantastic isn't it?' one lady asks rhetorically. 'Bloody rubbish, absolutely bloody rubbish, the art is crap (rubbish)' she answers. They both laugh (and so do I). I wonder what effect they will have on spreading the word about B. It comes back to the questions about whether or not B's exhibitions really do cater for a diverse public.*



## 7: Introduction

The empirical findings of the research carried out in Newcastle's Pink Triangle illuminates the multiple ways in which the public/private distinction structures and is structured by everyday life in the city. It is to the space of BALTIC contemporary art centre in Gateshead that this chapter turns. The key theme driving this chapter is the relationship between art, architecture and public space. It aims to critically analyse the extent to which the multiple stakeholders involved in the (re)production of BALTIC – through its conceived, perceived and lived dimensions – endeavour to make it function as a 'public space'. This chapter starts by discussing the intentions behind the physical design of the building, focussing specifically on the attempt to ground a newly functioning cultural venue within a local industrial building. Everything from the concept of the building to its materiality is discussed, with specific reference to 'the public' it aims to serve. This chapter asserts that architecture, like space, is composed of not only physical material, but also symbolic, ideational and experiential elements that are mediated by individuals on encounter.

Once the 'public' nature of the building of BALTIC has been analysed, the framing vision underpinning its overall function is carefully considered. The significance of the conceptual framework driving the programming policies of the institution is elaborated, paying close attention to the centrality of the 'local public' within the institutions overall remit. By highlighting the multiple ways in which the space is conceived and programmed by the designers, regulators and managers of the space – notably the Director, curators, artists and gallery assistants – a deeper understanding of the types of 'public' at the centre of these alternative visions is provided. BALTIC's extensive artistic programme draws diverse groups into a relationship with the institution; however, this does not necessarily lead to creating exchange between or within these often socially distinct groups. The extent to which art functions as a vehicle for public debate and discussion is therefore questionable.

A key question driving this chapter, and contemporary debates around what has been called the 'cultural renaissance' more broadly, is whose culture is being



promoted in the development and activities of such institutions? BALTIC is a particularly interesting case site to use for such an investigation, actively marketing itself as a 'public institution with a public responsibility' (BALTIC, 2004a: 12). This chapter examines how the specific kinds of activities offered through a contemporary art centre, present BALTIC with a set of critical challenges to overcome if they aim to appeal to a diverse public. Beneath the analysis, there is recognition that a cultural venue like BALTIC may be able to make itself more 'universally *accessible*' through sensitive programming, but it will be inherently difficult to make the specialist space universally *attractive*.

### **7.1: From Industrial Hub to Cultural Quarter: The Transformation of Gateshead Quays**

For many years, the site on which BALTIC now stands had been the industrial hub of the south bank of the River Tyne. This site is illustrated in **Figure 7.1**. As early as 1748, it was the location of a series of blacksmiths' workshops. From 1850-1889 it was the home of Gateshead Iron Works, whose projects and accomplishments included the High Level Bridge, which still links Gateshead to Newcastle-upon-Tyne. After the Iron Works closed, the site lay derelict until it was redeveloped as the BALTIC Flour Mills at the end of the 1930s. The Second World War interrupted construction of the flourmill and it was not until 1950 that the factory opened. The BALTIC Mill was built to make bread for Joseph Rank Ltd, taking its name from J. Rank, who named all of his mills after different seas and oceans. At one time, the mill employed around 300 people, about 170 of which still worked there when it closed in 1982 following a serious fire. For the hundreds of people employed there, BALTIC had become more than a place of work, it had become a centre for the local community and a place where thousands of memories were generated. Unbeknown to previous employees of the flourmill, their personal memories, which were thought to be merely private recollections, were about to be resurrected for public display, right in the very heart of the landscape in which they were originally created.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> BALTIC issued the video 'BALTIC memories', chronicling the history of the mill and including interviews with former mill workers and archival footage, connecting the present day art centre of international repute to its industrial past, and to the surrounding community that exists today (Marsh, 2004).



Figure 7.1: Gateshead Quays of the past

1957



1968



In what has been described as ‘one of the most exciting riverside developments of our time’ (Glancey, 2004), BALTIC’s only remaining construction, the former silo building with its 20,000 tonne capacity, has been transformed into the BALTIC centre for contemporary art.<sup>112</sup> Plans to turn the silo into an arts centre were first discussed in 1994, when the Arts Council announced that National Lottery funding was available for the development of a contemporary arts centre in the North East of England.<sup>113</sup> According to Gary Watts of Gateshead Council:

Newcastle Council said that they didn’t have anywhere to host such a venue and as an off the cuff remark a guy who has now retired, Bill MacNaught, who used to be Head of Learning and Culture here, said ‘Why don’t we convert the flour mill’ and that’s when it was born. From a simple idea came the BALTIC centre for contemporary art.  
(pers. comm., 2005)

In 1994, London-based architect, Dominic Williams, of Ellis William Architects, won an international competition organised by Gateshead Council and the Royal Institute of British Architects, to find an exciting and imaginative design

<sup>112</sup> Architectural recycling is not new and there are numerous examples among lottery-funded projects of former industrial buildings being given a new lease of life (Tate Modern at the former Bankside power Station, London, being the most obvious). And yet, BALTIC is a unique project in the current visual arts landscape: a brand new breed of public art space conceived and designed to be as flexible, accessible and transparent as possible.

<sup>113</sup> Evans (2001) believes that the enthusiasm for capital arts investment through Lottery funding should be seen in the context of a virtual standstill in local government spending over the past 20 years. Lottery funds were primarily used to meet years of under-investment and lack of maintenance of existing facilities i.e. the substitution of public finance with lottery funds, rather than the creation of new arts facilities, but this is not the case with BALTIC.



for the new art space. The dramatic conversion of the flourmill into a centre for international art began in 1998 and finished on 13<sup>th</sup> July 2002 when BALTIC opened its doors to an eagerly awaiting public.<sup>114</sup> The impetus for the redevelopment of the former grain silo can be understood in relation to broader political-economic frameworks.

As noted by Amin et al. (2001), the Rogers Report (UTF, 1999) recommended the reclamation of derelict and vacant land and buildings, with New Labour adopting this in its Urban White paper (DETR, 2000). Gateshead's then Deputy Leader, now Council Leader, Mick Henry, was directly responsive to these recommendations in his ambitious vision for the East Gateshead regeneration strategy: 'The vision for East Gateshead is to take a fragmented and declining area facing an uncertain future and turn it into one of the finest locations in Northern England for living, business, leisure and culture' (GC, 2001: 4). Illustrating the significance of creative individuals in driving the urban renaissance agenda, Henry created the framing vision for what has been promoted as 'one of the premium urban development sites in Europe', let alone the North of England (CABE, 2003: 3). However, the regeneration strategy for East Gateshead Quayside suffers from a number of problems. Cameron and Coaffee believe that:

Linked and enclosed by the bridges across the river, the developments now on either side [of the Tyne] form a veritable amphitheatre of urban renaissance, but one which appears both physically and socially divorced from the urban areas beyond the slopes. (2005: 42)

The extent to which the cultural developments that have proliferated along East Gateshead's south bank of the Tyne can reach out to the 'local public' has become a major subject for public debate. It is by critically analysing how BALTIC is designed, regulated, managed and used that its characterisation as an accessible and attractive 'public space' will be questioned. The extent to which BALTIC's programme caters for a wide range of interests and tastes will be discussed, as questions are asked about the nature of the relationship

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<sup>114</sup> In just 3 hours, 3,000 people visited BALTIC to see the inaugural exhibition B.Open that featured work and performances by regional, national and international artists. BALTIC received over 35, 000 visitors in its first week of opening (BALTIC, 2004b).



between BALTIC and its 'local public' and 'arts-specialist audience'. However, it is to the types of 'publicness' encouraged through the design of the BALTIC building to which this chapter first turns.

### **7.1.1: Building a better future: Industrial heritage and innovative design**

One of the most distinctive features of BALTIC is its iconographic status as a building within the Northeast of England, standing as a bold, clear and concrete reminder of the industrial past of Gateshead and the region more broadly (**Figure 7.1.1**). As stated by one interviewee:

The BALTIC building symbolises all of what the Northeast stands for, a hard work ethic of the local people who take the opportunities they're given and develop them into a source of pride. My granddad used to work in the mill and for his generation it's almost like a monument to the people who worked there, and it's fantastic that the future generation will be able to enter into the building, all be it for different reasons.  
(Stephen, pers. comm., 2005)

A number of the participants in this research praised the way this symbolic landmark now provides alternative opportunities for local people.

Maintaining as much as possible local heritage in the renovation of the old flourmill was at the forefront of the mind of the Architect responsible for the development. Dominic Williams claimed that: 'It has always been important to retain as much of the existing character of the fabric as possible, whilst clearly and unambiguously announcing the structure's new purpose' (BALTIC, 2002d: 138). The contemporary art centre even retains the name of the old flourmill, BALTIC, to show its commitment to maintaining the local identity of the building despite its transformation in function and form.

For Williams, it was important that the 'local public' could relate to the building housing the contemporary art centre. From the point of inception, there was an acknowledgement of the challenge ahead in encouraging the local public to use such unprecedented facilities. Gary Watts noted how: 'The people of Gateshead didn't create a demand for the contemporary art institution, it was a speculative development of the council' (pers. comm., 2005); whilst the



Community Programmer for BALTIC, Jude Watts, commented that: 'The fact that BALTIC didn't spring from a local arts group poses a whole host of challenges for us' (pers. comm., 2005). There was a consensus that to encourage the local people and a 'non-specialist' audience into the arts centre, the building would have to provide a point of interest. BALTIC achieves this, alluring the gaze of passers by, as demonstrated by one interviewee:

Even if you don't want to go into the BALTIC it's somewhere that you can look at from either side of the River, if you know what I mean. Well to be honest, you don't have much choice whether you want to look at it or not when you're down here, it's bloody massive.

(Trevor, pers. comm., 2005)

### 7.1.2 Pompidou Centre, Paris

**Figure 7.1.1: Gateshead Quays 2007**



### Drawing on Leblond, Barker et al. (2008) and Top of the World (2007)

The team designing the contemporary art factory anticipated a deeper public engagement with BALTIC than a fleeting glance or mere visual contemplation. For the designers, if members of the public were to be encouraged into BALTIC, to develop a relationship with the institution, increased approachability was essential. They believed that the historicity of the building and its familiarity on the Quayside landscape would provide such accessibility for the local community. As Williams states: 'Entering the former grain silo - free of charge - is to enter into a familiar yet unknown building: like a magic house in your own



backyard, a wonderland on safe territory' (BALTIC, 2002d: 16). That the silo had a strong connection with local people meant that it was considered to be unthreatening or 'safe'. Unlike the post-modern constructions of some comparable contemporary art centres within Europe, the best example probably being the bizarre and intriguing design of Richard Rogers' Pompidou centre in Paris (see Figure 7.1.2), BALTIC's designers considered it to be inviting, as opposed to intimidating and perplexing.<sup>115</sup> However, the meaning of buildings is neither stable nor unmediated and some of its potential users contest the idea of the flourmill as welcoming and unthreatening.

### 7.1.2 Pompidou Centre, Paris



Drawing on Lefebvre, Borden et al. highlight how: 'Too often architecture is designed (and consequently comprehended) as purely aesthetic or intellectual activity, ignoring social relations and rendering people passive' (2000: 4). The design and form of a space directly influences how or whether people will choose to use that space. Whether or not space is inviting and/or uninviting to specific members of the public has received attention in earlier chapters of this thesis, revealing how designers increasingly attempt to design social relations

<sup>115</sup> Rogers' Pompidou is designed so that the internal workings of the building e.g. water, gas and electricity, are actually placed on the outside of the building.



such as inclusion/exclusion into spaces. In BALTIC's case, there has been an explicit attempt to design local public trust and accessibility into the building using specific design mechanisms. The exterior façade, BALTIC's shell, aims to be open and welcoming, for example, by opening up the East and West faces of the building to public view by constructing them as continuous glass panels (**see Figure 7.1.3**). It was anticipated that by opening up the building to public view, a sense of inclusion, honesty and transparency would be generated - all qualities that are associated with models of 'good public space' (CABE, 2005). Williams believed that if the building of BALTIC - both inside and outside - were itself visible to the public, it would be more conducive to inspiring public confidence in the accessibility and credibility of what was happening in the space. As will be discussed below, assuming such interrelations is inherently problematic.

**Figure 7.1.3 BALTIC, Gateshead**



BALTIC's first Director, Sunes Nordgren, hoped that the honest nature of the building's decoration would engineer a sense of authenticity and sincerity. It is a space that is true to its roots in a very fundamental sense: 'Nothing is painted over or covered - wood is wood, glass is glass, steel is steel. Even the concrete is exposed on many supporting surfaces' (Nordgren, BALTIC 2002a). There is a sense of honesty and transparency about the actual building of BALTIC, as



one respondent claimed:

You can tell that this is a modernist building; it has a sense of place and a character, which people can identify with. There's none of the faff and fanciness of some of the new buildings these days. It makes me feel comfortable this building. (Bill, pers. comm., 2005)

However, whilst the respondent describes the building as 'modernist', it is not so easy to categorise BALTIC in this way. In fact, considering modernist architecture as 'natural' is a contradiction – a contradiction that stems from the predominantly industrial impetus that inspired modernist architectural development.

BALTIC combines modernist architecture which 'emulated the machine in order to accommodate industrial society' with post-modern architecture which 'seeks inspiration from pre-industrial society to accommodate post-industrial society' (Ellin, 1996: 62). Whilst it is not the intention of this chapter to extensively outline both approaches, according to Ellin (1996) the key characteristics of post-modern architecture are reactions to the shortcomings of modernist architecture (**see Appendix 4**). Being situated within a modernist shell, but transformed for a contemporary function, the BALTIC building could be viewed as a 'recovery of place' or the 'respecting of the genius loci' (Ellin, 1996: 48). It follows Norberg-Schulz's suggestion that 'we must not copy the old, but interpret it in new ways' (1979: 182). This is precisely what BALTIC as an architectural form does – it reinterprets the 'industrial factory' of the past in new ways – renovating it and reproducing it as an art factory.

BALTIC is without a doubt a spectacular building, but it manages to avoid the playfulness and fancy of many contemporary buildings, purposely leaving such qualities to be generated by the art displayed and/or produced there. It has a strong identity as an industrial heritage site and even the interior is decorated to give it a natural feel. As Nordgren claims: 'The colours are warm, organic and natural. The bright and spectacular, the fun and the challenging colours are brought into the building by the art and the artists and the colourful mixture of people visiting' (BALTIC, 2002c: 42). Whilst the materials used in BALTIC are portrayed as simple, straightforward and honest, they could also be conceived



as an attempt to eradicate the industrial past of the building. Equally, and perhaps unsurprisingly given its monumental form (and as I will go on later to discuss, its arguably elitist function), the building is not always experienced as honest.

As Leach argues: 'Architecture is not the autonomous art it is often held out to be. Buildings are designed and constructed within a complex web of social and political concerns' (1997: xiv). To ignore the conditions under which architecture is practiced, is to fail to understand the full social import of architecture. Our reception of the built environment is always mediated by consciousness and experience. The refusal to address the ways in which this mediation takes place, is a refusal to address the full question of architecture. It is important at this stage, to highlight the way in which the physicality of BALTIC is only one of the major elements that needs to be considered in its production. To go back to Lefebvre's (1991) conceptual triad outlined in Chapter Five, one need not only look at the *representations of space*, but also the *spaces of representation* and *spatial practice* constituting BALTIC.

This involves critically exploring the dominant *representations of space* underlying BALTIC's design and overall framing vision, the kinds of *spatial practices* that are facilitated through the building's form and function – with specific reference to its programming strategy - and how individuals use their operational power to mediate the social, mental and physical capacities of BALTIC in everyday life. BALTIC does not simply exist as a publicly accessible space; it must be reproduced through everyday practice in ways that make it so. To examine the 'publicness' of BALTIC, therefore, is to consider the way in which the space is designed, regulated, managed and used by the multiple stakeholders involved in its everyday (re)production.

Architecture has mental, social and physical qualities, all of which play an important part in its (re)production and how it is experienced in everyday life. If, as argued by Borden (2001), architecture is something which is continually reproduced through everyday life, the way in which it is reproduced depends



upon the constituents involved in its production, and the individuals involved in the (re)creation and reception and/or interpretations of such productions. Writing a report to CABE, Borden is astute to note that architecture is, therefore, not just an object, but also a process, not a thing, but a flow, 'not an abstract idea but a lived thought' (2003: 9). The 'lived' dimension of architecture proves particularly instructive in helping to understand how buildings become interpreted and negotiated by individuals in diverse ways, because the meaning of architecture, like public space, is never entirely stable.

The varying experiences of BALTIC's architecture amongst the interviewees disclosed this, as some felt drawn to the industrial heritage site, which provided a strong personal connection for them, whilst others felt intimidated by the overwhelming stature of the imposing structure. As discussed in earlier chapters of the thesis, space is never experienced in the same way by everyone, and this argument is transportable to architecture too. Instead of being a building with which everyone could feel comfortable and identify, Jude Watts noted that:

BALTIC is a massive institutional building and this is something which can intimidate certain groups, for example, I work with some groups with mental health issues and I always meet them outside so that I can bring them in to the building. This helps to make them feel comfortable and at ease as opposed to scared by the imposing building. (pers. comm., 2005)

In sum: 'Architecture is seen to lie beyond the province of the architect, and is thrown instead into the turbulent nexus of reproduction' (Borden et al., 2001: 5). The way some of the diverse users of the space perceive BALTIC as physically intimidating and unnerving, contrasts with the way in which the designers, builders, and the first Director of the art centre conceived it as being an open and welcoming space. There is a mismatch between the dominant *representations of space* and the *spatial practices* involved in reproducing BALTIC at any given time.

As discussed in Chapter Four, the architectural fruits of the urban renaissance have been widely critiqued for their homogenising effects. If one were to



believe the claims of an increasing movement towards placeless cities where each and every urban locale starts to appear almost like a clear reflection of any of its other Western counterparts, East Gateshead Quayside would come as a refreshing and reinvigorating alternative. This premium urban area may follow the common trend towards waterfront development, aiming to 'open up the life of the city through the grand appeal of its natural features' (GC, 2002a); however, it is unique. I frequently contemplated the aesthetically pleasing and well-designed nature of BALTIC and its immediately surrounding areas, whilst carrying out ethnographic research, as noted in my field diary:

Despite having been on numerous visits to European, American and Australasian cities, there really is something special, something unique about the developments taking place down here. I don't know if it's the fact that, at one time, I was witness to the industrial ruins which once occupied this space, or whether it's the contemporaneous nature of the developments that are taking place.  
(2006)

Miles (2005) notes how culture-led regeneration does not necessarily lead to the construction of a 'blandscape'. Using Gateshead-Newcastle Quayside to illustrate this point, Miles argues:

Critics of developments on the Quayside in the 1990s may have been justified in describing the mixture of offices, bars and restaurants on the Newcastle side in this fashion. However, in combination with the iconic projects across the river, the Quayside offers something very different [see figure 7.1.1]. (2005: 919)

For Miles (2005), Cameron and Coaffee (2005), Gateshead Council and a number of interviewees, The Millennium Bridge, the BALTIC and the Sage Gateshead are symbols of an exciting future rooted in the past. As Moore and Abbass (2004) and Forrest and Kearns (1999) suggest, the original physical environment has an important role to play in fostering community morale, and indeed for building bridges between generations and groups in a local community. After all, the success of investment in iconic cultural projects depends above all upon people's sense of belonging, whilst balancing 'achievements of the past with ambitions of the future' (Miles, 2005: 913). Miles clearly states that: 'The iconic projects on the Quayside provide an avenue through which this potential can conceivably be realised' (2005: 919). This



alternative avenue can be broadly conceived as a 'cultural renaissance'.

## **7.2: Gateshead Council: Bridging publics through a cultural renaissance?**

Art and culture, alongside gentrification, have been extensively used in public policy, in attempts to regenerate declining cities by making improvements to public space. Sharp et al. highlight that:

The incorporation of major public art projects into regeneration schemes has become a key factor in re-branding a city's image, especially in post-industrial towns – in the UK, Glasgow, Birmingham and Gateshead are principal examples where culture, including public art, has been vaunted as a force in changing each city's fortunes. (2005: 1012)

The work of Graeme Evans is helpful in understanding the impetus behind the conversion of the BALTIC flourmill into the centre for contemporary art, locating it within an international trend:

The late twentieth century has seen a renaissance in new and improved cultural facilities; from arts centres, theatres, museums, to multiples cinemas and public art. Cities worldwide have sought to change their image and economies. Industrial cities have become cultural capitals. (2001: 1)

Evans' work tracks the movement towards what he calls 'cultural planning', where the degenerating effects of industrial decline have been combated by the regenerating effects of the development of cultural quarters. The development of underused and neglected parts of the urban realm has become a common strategy developed by urban planners as the transformation of key public sites is considered to directly improve the imageability and overall attraction of the area:

Cultural planning, as well as an aspect, albeit an exceptional one, of amenity planning, has therefore played a role and one that is increasingly being adopted in the post-industrial era in meeting economic and physical regeneration as well as 'place-making' objectives, and as an approach to urban design and the more integrated planning of towns and cities. (Evans, 2001: 3-4)

The objectives of cultural planning, therefore, echo those of the overall urban renaissance agenda as set out in Chapter Two, whereby physical transformation is linked to environmental and social improvement through



‘place-making’ strategies.

Gateshead Council has been a pioneer of adopting cultural planning as a form of regeneration, something that Gary Watts implied when talking about the transformation of East Gateshead:

Gateshead wasn't even on the national map until we developed the BALTIC. Up until that point, we were just thought to be a problem area. BALTIC has really changed the image of Gateshead for the better, it has given us hope. It's really turned the area around.<sup>116</sup>  
(pers. comm., 2005)

From the mid-1980s, Gateshead Council decided that art and culture would be the key to regeneration plans for the area, and it has been successful in creating an environment that is conducive to developing the long term vision for the local area, providing a set of circumstances where ‘things simply do get done’ (Biles, 2002). As Cameron and Coaffee (2005) argue, Gateshead Council has embraced innovative ways of conceiving the potential value of art and culture as regeneration catalysts, focussing first on the building of the town's confidence and then that of potential developers, through careful partnership working.<sup>117</sup>

Hetherington (2002) and Hickling (2002) argue that the arts-led regeneration of the Gateshead Quays has benefited the wider city and its public through its positive impact on both the external and the self-image of the town. Hickling, writing about BALTIC, Sage, the Millennium Bridge and the Angel, highlights that: ‘The scale of the cultural re-branding of Gateshead is unprecedented: while most cities would be proud to create a single world-class cultural status symbol, Gateshead can boast four’ (*The Guardian*, 24 June 2002). Hetherington, alongside many of the interviewees incorporated into this research, credit Gateshead Council for the areas internationally acclaimed cultural icons: ‘What is happening here [Gateshead] is unique with a

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<sup>116</sup> There is no doubt the cultural regeneration initiatives along the East Gateshead Quayside have put the area on the map, but the Gateshead flower show and the Angel of the North were already making Gateshead a national destination for cultural tourists.

<sup>117</sup> According to DCMS figures, the total of around £250 million investment by Gateshead Council into the East Quayside cultural quarter, has generated over £1 billion in private-sector funding (Miles, 2005: 917).



combination of cultural statements, thanks to a visionary and determined council' (*The Guardian*, 12 July 2002). Gateshead Council, a public authority with a public responsibility, was even been awarded Beacon status in 2006, partly because of the success of its cultural programme in changing around the fortunes of the area and its citizens.

The cultural dimension to development - a form and function of land use and economic planning - is seen as an important component of economic and social policy, rather than an aspect of society that is peripheral or at least subsidiary to the political economy and the public sphere (McGuigan, 1996). As Zukin asserts:

Rightly or wrongly, cultural strategies have become keys to cities' survival...how these cultural strategies are defined and how social critics, observers, and participants see them, requires explicit discussion. (1995: 271)

At the root of the concerns over how cultural strategies are adopted to regenerate urban centres, is the fundamental question of whose culture is being provided for in the facilities that are being developed. As McGuigan (1996) argues, there is an obvious political-economy element involved in the cultural regeneration strategies being rolled out across urban locations such as Gateshead, and this has implications for the types of public spaces and venues being created under such agendas. In turn, it is important to go back to Harvey's (2000) warning that when considering the development of public spaces, it is crucial to examine which members of 'the public' are being incorporated into such developments.

Evans argues that: 'The places where collective and public cultural activity occur have an important and lasting influence - aesthetic, social, economic and symbolic - on the form and function of towns and cities' (2001: 1). The venues traditionally associated with public culture e.g. cafes, museums and theatres, are more often than not conceptualised as 'public spaces'. The reason for this goes back to Iveson's ideas as set out in Chapter Four, whereby public space is endowed with the responsibility for reflecting 'collective' interests and bringing 'the public' together. As BALTIC has influenced the 'aesthetic, social, economic



and symbolic' aspects of Gateshead (and the surrounding area), it is important to consider the extent to which specific notions of 'public' underpin the perceived, conceived and lived dimensions of the space.

### **7.2.1: The Millennium Bridge: Bridging the publics of Newcastle and Gateshead spatially and socially?**

The construction of the multiple award-winning Millennium Bridge is so crucial to BALTIC's success that it warrants discussion. One of the most important points is that the Millennium Bridge is not only a link between Newcastle and Gateshead, but also a symbol of social and political connection. The Stirling Award winning bridge provides a direct pedestrian walkway and cycleway across the Tyne, allowing the publics of the neighbouring urban realms to access the facilities provided on either side of the river more easily (see **Figure 7.2.1**). Gary Watts claimed that while the renovation of the flourmill was not dependent upon the construction of the bridge, there was a sigh of relief when the funding for the bridge was acquired:

Oh, the bridge makes such a difference, I mean it links the two sides of the River together nicely, and access is such a prime concern for public institutions. Do you know that if you wanted to walk to BALTIC from the Newcastle side you would have to walk a whole mile up to and over the Swing Bridge? (pers. comm., 2005)

Whereas physical accessibility issues are important considerations in any well functioning public space, this section focuses on the extent to which the two 'publics' of Gateshead and Newcastle have been bridged politically.

One of Newcastle City Council's employees noted that 'historically Gateshead and Newcastle Council were bitter rivals. However presently, the two authorities have achieved a degree of cooperation that would have been unimaginable 15 years ago' (Anon, pers. comm., 2005). This rivalry stemmed from the two local authorities ordinarily having to compete for the same central government funding. However, in recent years, as the aims and ambitions of the two councils have coalesced, things have changed and, as discussed earlier, Newcastle and Gateshead have put together joint funding and competition bids. A key component of Tyneside's regeneration housing is even



called 'Bridging Newcastle-Gateshead'. As Cameron and Coaffee argue:

The physical linkage of the bridge has to an extent been mirrored by a new policy partnership between Gateshead and Newcastle with the formation of the Newcastle Gateshead Initiative (TNGI) to promote the [ultimately unsuccessful] European capital of Culture 2008 bid, as well as promote more generally the regeneration of 'Central Tyneside'.  
(2005: 49)

The political connections between Gateshead and Newcastle have depended upon both councils benefiting directly from the partnership. For example, and perhaps surprisingly, Newcastle City Council rejected the offer of hosting the BALTIC art factory because they did not feel that the city needed another art space and, therefore, offered Gateshead Council no support in the bid to secure funding for the Millennium Bridge.

**Figure 7.2.1: Gateshead Millennium Bridge**



Jane Rendell notes the German cultural critic, Georg Simmel, suggested that the reason bridges are such strong symbols are that they both separate and connect. Drawing on Simmel's work, she states: 'I like this notion because it allows both sides to be connected whilst retaining their own identities, which is



important for the relationship between Gateshead and Newcastle' (BALTIC, 2002e: 24). Whereas Newcastle and Gateshead's 'publics' have been (re)connected physically by the bridge and the subsequent political commitments through their joint Building Bridges strategy (2002) (see Chapter Four), their coming together seems to have been a reluctant reunion on Newcastle Council's part. This provides a direct source of irritation for Gateshead Council as Newcastle largely benefits from Gateshead's achievements without contributing any resources towards the cultural development initiatives. There is also some frustration that BALTIC, like the Millennium Bridge and the Angel of the North, is often viewed from outside as reflecting the regeneration of 'Newcastle'.

As stated by Gary Watts:

Newcastle does benefit hugely from being thought to have developed our cultural icons, but it's marked quite clearly in the promotional literature that BALTIC is in Gateshead and it's the Gateshead Millennium Bridge. It has 'Gateshead Millennium Bridge' written on the docksides of both sides of the bridge. (pers. comm., 2005)

Gateshead Council is justifiably proud of its achievements along the East Gateshead Quayside, not least because of the lack of support that it had from its neighbouring local authority. As noted in a DEMOS report:

Gateshead has been a very single-minded public authority with no problems or crisis of political leadership. George Gill was a very single-minded political leader and Les Elton is outstanding. They have developed a clear vision and in many ways put Newcastle City Council to shame. Newcastle had to go along with it.

(Minton, 2003: 17)

The significance of strong local leadership in the delivery of a successful urban renaissance is a key component of New Labour's policy. However, Chapter Two argued that there is nothing inherently good about devolving urban regeneration initiatives to the local level. Rather, there is a need for innovative and qualified individuals to create and deliver successful strategies. In the case of Gateshead Council, having the courage to stick to your plans in the face of hostility and adversity seems paramount and, as Landry and Bianchini argue: 'There is often a need to go against the grain of supposed common sense,



conventional wisdom and narrow commercial imperatives' (1995: 55). Gateshead Council is dedicated to ensuring that the facilities it provides, such as BALTIC, are accessible to the 'local public' and have a far-reaching effect in any potential benefits they can bring to the public. Therefore, it has attempted to become actively involved in setting BALTIC's agenda.

### 7.3: Creating a vision for BALTIC

The centrality of 'the public' to BALTIC's overall remit appears, at certain times, to be merely paying lip service to governmental agendas; at other times, it appears to be a genuine aim of the institution and its employees; and at others, nothing more than a utopian dream considering its specific function. This is not least because, as this chapter will argue, the key stakeholders involved in orchestrating BALTIC's broader strategy employ multiple visions of who 'the public' is and what a 'public space' like BALTIC should be and do. However, one of the problematic areas that warrants discussion in relation to its overall framing vision is the very specific and specialist public that produced it in the first instance.

Before BALTIC's opening in July 2002, a body of trustees and a Director were employed to set about creating a framing vision to drive its aims, objectives and ambitions. As highlighted by Minton:

From its inception, BALTIC drew on the very best international expertise, appointing experienced consultants as advisors and involving Sandy Nairne, now the right-hand man to Nicholas Serota as Assistant Director at the Tate. High standards may seem an obvious part of any recipe for success, but this aspect of the story relates to wider arguments about elitism and inclusion in the arts.

(2003: 23)

Much of the formal discussion that took place between BALTIC's original trustees, Sunes Nordgren and a number of specialist arts-audience members - composed of artists, curators and Art Centre Directors - is chronicled in a publicly available book series entitled *B.Read*. The seven books that constitute the series document the original dialogue that took place around what BALTIC should be and how it should be conceived. It is significant that the 'public'



involved in these foundational discussions was a very specific arts-specialist and arguably elitist public. Throughout the entire series, there is no mention of including the 'local public' in the development process of BALTIC's overall remit; rather the 'arts-specialist community' are supposed to 'know what is best for the overall public due to existing expertise in this specialist area' (BALTIC, 2002f:10).

The then Chairman, Alan Smith, describes the original vision for BALTIC as:

At the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there is a recognised need for a 'third-space', a place which is neither work nor home, where people can engage in a stimulating intellectual environment and where the edges between learning and leisure, education and entertainment, are blurred, where people are excited and have fun, even though they may, on occasion, be challenged. (BALTIC, 2002d: 12)

Smith's vision strikes a chord with some of the key issues at the centre of this thesis. BALTIC was to provide a space *between* work and home, a space for leisure, in which users could relax and be in the co-presence of other members of the public. It was aiming to be a multifunctional 'edutainment' space, offering a range of activities for diverse user groups – all of these features figure within New Labour's vision of 'public space', as set out in Chapter Two. Whereas 'the public' are represented as a key priority in the everyday use of BALTIC, its exclusion from creating the key conceptualisation underlying its framing vision – the 'Art Factory' - becomes very clear.

### 7.3.1: BALTIC as an 'Art Factory'

Dominic Williams describes the fusion between the old building and its new purpose in the following way:

The aim is to allow contemporary art to happen in whatever form it takes. Often 'art' installations take on, or pervert, the nature of the space they occupy. The original function of the building was to collect, contain and distribute flour through the unseen working of the silos. In many ways activities are unchanged, with the building now refocused to a new use, BALTIC is still a building about process. Works will come, be created and go. (BALTIC, 2002d: 14)

As BALTIC would not only be a space for the display of contemporary art, but



also a place where art would be made, the original framing vision for BALTIC was not that of an art centre but an 'Art Factory'.

As its first Director, Sunes Nordgren profoundly influenced the original conception of BALTIC. BALTIC's introductory promotional brochures stated that:

The fundamental idea behind BALTIC - the concept that drives almost everything that happens within it – is that it is an 'Art Factory'. In other words BALTIC is more than just a container for art.  
(BALTIC, 2002c: 32)

It is a place where the art of our time is produced and exhibited; an Art Factory rather than an art museum. (BALTIC, 2002f: 44)

Drawing on Andy Warhol's initial conception of the 'Art Factory' in Germany (1964) (also the Warhol museum in Pittsburgh modelled on this idea), Nordgren envisioned BALTIC as much more than a 'container' where art would be displayed for an audience. Instead, he conceived BALTIC as a dynamic and creative space where artistic talents would come together and (re)produce the space of the renovated silo.

This developed Williams' notions of art taking on and perverting the space of the building, to the art actually being produced within the building and, in turn, constantly (re)producing the building itself through its direct relation with it. Such aspirations resonate with the way in which space is constantly (re)produced through ideational, physical, experiential and conceptual interrelations. The key representation of space, conceiving BALTIC as an 'Art Factory', in the 'sketches and maps of planners and urbanists' (Lefebvre, 1991:33) such as Williams, could be enlivened at the level of spatial practice. However, only the material building itself and the forms of 'production and reproduction' it enables through the creation of art and the presence of an arts audience (Lefebvre, 1991: 33), could facilitate such spatial practice. BALTIC was to be a space which was processual and the (re)creation of alternative forms of art (and, hence, spaces) would be facilitated through the changing exhibition and production programmes, and the diverse socio-spatial relations they encouraged.



Jane Rendell argued that: 'With BALTIC, the concept of the factory is still about production, but this time the design is about flexibility rather than specificity' (2002: 45). BALTIC would change depending on the constituents (re)producing that space, be it the artists involved in the creation of the displays, the pieces of art produced by the artists exhibiting at any particular time, the reactions of the multiple members of the public attracted to or diverted away from the exhibition, or any of the other relations and actors involved in the (re)production of the everyday processes activating BALTIC. In fact, the building itself has been designed so that it can adapt to the changing demands of contemporary art (which is by definition, constantly changing with the times), allowing for different kinds of art to be both (re)produced and displayed in the building itself, including visual, audio and kinaesthetic pieces.

In terms of organisation, art can be practiced, performed and produced on five different floors, with each level providing a diverse set of opportunities (**see Figure 7.3.1**). As formulated by Williams, the design of the building has the intention of fitting with BALTIC's overall remit: 'It's about getting away from the static museum and moving towards something that is perhaps less controlled and more about change' (2002b: 44). In some respects, BALTIC's remit changes more established ways of conceiving art centres. The way in which BALTIC was conceived as a site of production, as well as a site for consumption, seemed to throw the traditional notion of the audience as viewer and the artists as outsider into disrepute. Equally, BALTIC moved away from the museum as a reference point for a stable public memory, refusing to house a permanent exhibition and/or collection, and instead deciding to constantly challenge 'the public' through its transient and ever changing exhibition programme.

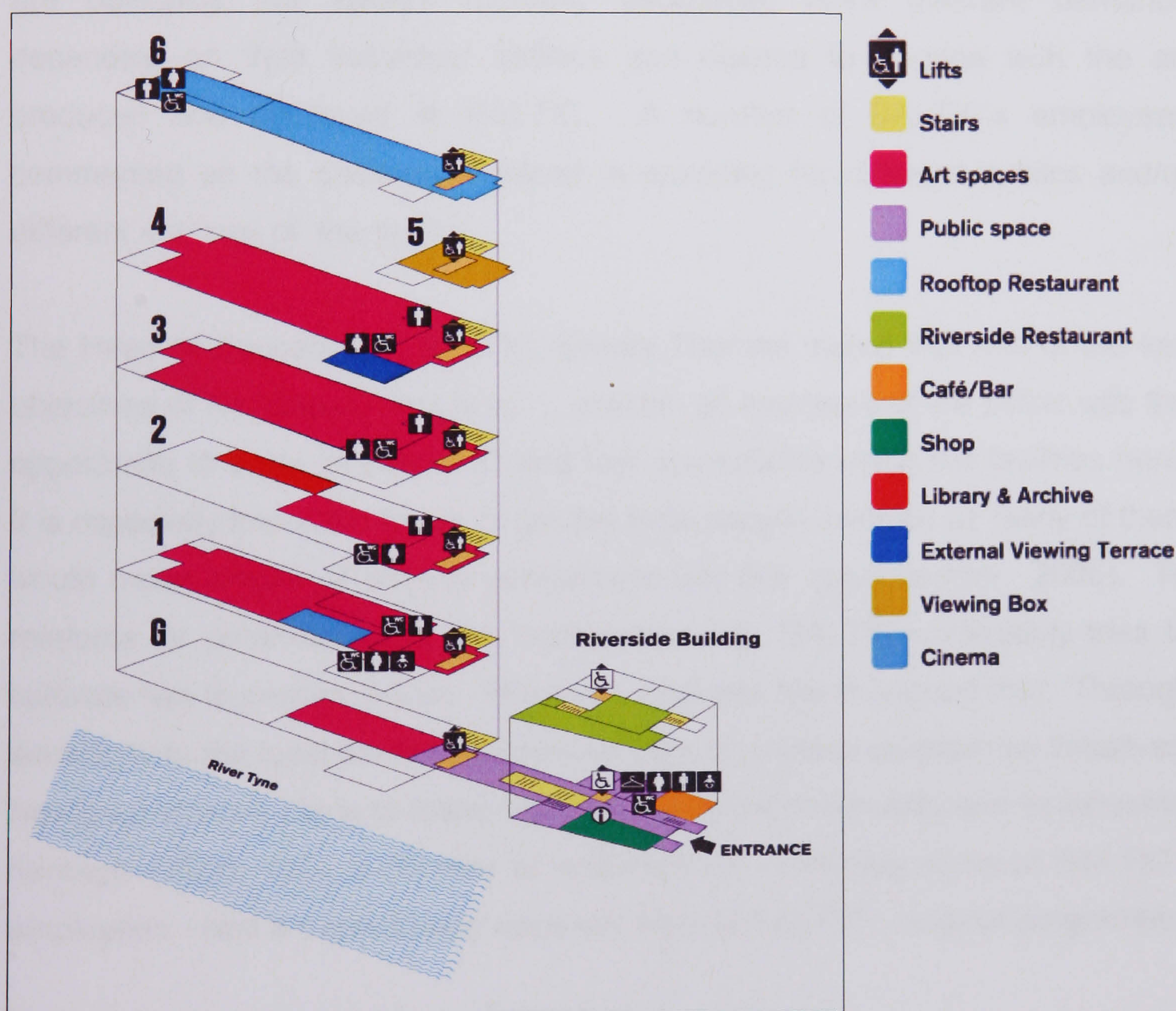
### **7.3.2: A Public institution with a public responsibility**

BALTIC was the brainchild of Gateshead Council and relied heavily on the generation of public funding to ensure that its development would go-ahead. Due to the large financial input from Gateshead Council and its external funding bodies, BALTIC was acutely aware, from an embryonic stage, of its public



responsibility. BALTIC, like other institutions such as TATE Modern, is eager to affiliate itself with the 'local public' of Gateshead, rather than parade a solely global identity, or its 'high-culture' associations. By doing this, Marsh argues that: 'These institutions would appear to be refuting any aristocratic claim on the 'fine arts', affirming the rightful place of the arts within the public domain' (2004: 102). Whereas the pitfalls of encouraging certain sections of the local community into BALTIC will be discussed more thoroughly below, it is crucial to highlight the very centrality of the local public to BALTIC's overall vision and subsequent programming.

Figure 7.3.1: BALTIC floorplan



Whilst officially, there is an intention to serve the local public through a contemporary art institution, considering the socio-economic background of Gateshead, the challenges in doing so are 'inevitable and extreme' (Watts,



pers. comm., 2006). Paul Usherwood proposes:

It is one thing to lay on wonderful exhibition spaces, studios, restaurants, bookshops and lecture theatres and expect audiences from various metropolitan centres to start getting off at Gateshead...quite another to build a local audience willing and able to provide a vital part of the informed, engaged, critical context in which art matters, art with real bite, actually happens.

(BALTIC, 2004b: 23)

What Usherwood articulates, and one of the main challenges facing BALTIC, is that there are a number of different publics (re)created through the types of facilities and encounters provided through the arts centre. Each of these publics, including the art-specialist audience and the local public (groups which are obviously not always mutually exclusive), have different demands depending on their individual abilities and desires to engage with the art produced and displayed in BALTIC. A number of BALTIC's employees commented on the challenges raised in providing for different publics and/or different sections of 'the public'.

The Head of Education at BALTIC, Emma Thomas, noted that one of the key objectives of her Department is to: '...provide all members of the public with the opportunity to enter into BALTIC and feel comfortable using the facilities here. It is especially important for us to get the local people involved as many of them would never dream of coming somewhere like this' (pers. comm., 2005). To reinforce its commitment to the local community, BALTIC undeniably tries to cultivate ties to certain groups. However, whereas Marsh argued that: 'Through sensitivity to the local context, expressed through various programme initiatives, Nordgren actively plans to foster many ties with the community and its industrial heritage' (2004: 102), a number of respondents - including some of BALTIC's employees - had a diametrically opposed view of BALTIC's original programme.

Some of the employees at BALTIC viewed Nordgren's choice of exigent installations as problematic. However, Nordgren believed that the challenging programme he set out was down to public reaction to contemporary art in general, not his lack of consideration for the context of the institution, stating: 'With contemporary art you don't necessarily like it immediately; you have to go



back, or take part in a workshop or a guided tour, or read a little bit more about it' (BALTIC, 2002a: 29). There was a general consensus amongst the employees interviewed that contemporary art 'could be incredibly challenging', 'it is something which people find complex and abstract until they know how to approach it in their own way' (Watts, pers. comm., 2005). However, one employee proclaimed: 'Sunes developed a program which even I couldn't understand and I've worked in art museums for nearly 15 years. It's no wonder that a lot of people were put off from coming back' (Stevenson-Read, pers. comm., 2005). Therefore, despite Nordgren's claims that the local public were at the centre of BALTIC's vision, the space was actually experienced as unattractive and sometimes exclusionary because of the demanding programme developed by the Director.

That many people found the art produced in BALTIC 'incredibly complex', 'mind-boggling' or just 'absolutely rubbish', made it very difficult for them to form any connection with it. Often people found the art displays disengaging, commenting that they would only visit BALTIC to show their friends around or take in the view from the viewing tower on Level 6. For a large proportion of the interviewees, the viewing station provided the most accessible area within the arts centre. However, the view held limited appeal, as one interviewee explained: 'There is no doubt that the view from the viewing platform is incredible, I mean there's nothing quite like it. However, you can't come here all the time for the view' (Helen, pers. comm., 2006). That the viewing tower within BALTIC acts as a public destination in its own right is not necessarily a bad thing. However, such visits cannot facilitate sustained public engagement and debate with the contemporary issues raised through the artwork, which is a key aspiration of the institution.

As Head of Visitor Services, Rebecca Stevenson-Read, noted: 'Many people come for the view alone and if young lads just want to come in, go up there in the lift and then come straight back down that's fine by us. We're not too precious about being an art gallery' (pers. comm., 2005). The way in which some people, for example 'the young lads' that Stevenson-Read talks about,



merely pass through the art gallery floors in a lift shows how the space can operate as a multifunctional site offering a number of diverse activities. People can go to BALTIC for a coffee in the Café, a light lunch in the Riverside Restaurant or a fine-dining dinner in the exclusive Rooftop Restaurant. They can get involved in art production in the studios, take part in a free guided tour, use the extensive library facilities provided, visit the viewing platform or view the art provided in the gallery spaces themselves. However, the spatial practices of different members of 'the public' create a social stratigraphy that can be understood as spatially inscribed and enacted. This is perhaps most exaggerated in relation to the commercial facilities provided at BALTIC.

### **7.3.3: Dividing BALTIC's publics: spatial stratigraphy as social stratigraphy**

Managing the boundary (between public and private) is a complex matter of demarcating spaces and sorting out bodies. There are different degrees of formality at work along this front, governed by explicit and more tacit logics of inclusion and prohibition. Public policing, private security, social aversion, hostility and harassment, codes of consumption and conduct interact in various ways to determine both the rules of access to public space and the exclusion zones of the private. (Tonkiss, 2005: 72)

Whereas BALTIC is touted as a public space, which aims to embody equality by providing free access to all and operating a broad and inclusionary programme, the everyday nature of the building illustrates how certain parts of it are exclusionary. The zones of exclusion that operate within BALTIC are namely the consumption spaces of Milburn's Café and Riverside Restaurant, and McCoys rooftop 'fine-dining' restaurant. The local press, most notably *The Evening Chronicle*, has repeatedly criticised BALTIC for failing to provide consumption facilities that are affordable for the local people.

It is common knowledge that the catering facilities provided at BALTIC are at the high-end of the consumer market. Moving through BALTIC's floors, an increasing social stratigraphy mirrors an increase in spatial stratigraphy. As you move from Milburn's Café on the ground floor, to their Riverside Restaurant on



the second floor, to McCoys exclusive rooftop restaurant on the 6<sup>th</sup> floor, you need to have more financial capital to access the facilities. As stated by Tonkiss:

Tactics of exclusion form a part of what Davis terms the 'social relations of the built environment', the way that urban spaces inscribe and reproduce social and economic divisions. The political economy of the city is not confined, after all, to questions of who owns what, but how this spatial economy is regulated in terms of access, exclusion and control. (2005: 74)

The commercial nature of BALTIC's catering facilities price a large number of their visitors out of the market, privatising sections of the public building and 'sorting' affluent from non-affluent bodies. Whereas the arts facilities are predominantly based around encouraging symbolic value, the commercial venues are driven by exchange value. Within BALTIC, relations of 'publicness' and 'privacy' circulate in, through and across different spaces in different ways. An individual's ability to use the private spaces of the consumption outlets, or embrace the relations of 'privacy' that they offer is highly dependent upon financial capital. However, as will be discussed below, the increased 'publicness' of the gallery spaces does not guarantee easy access. Accessibility is profoundly influential in determining which activities, if any, people tend to get involved in at BALTIC, however, accessibility can be measured in various ways.

#### **7.3.4: BALTIC as a public institution: A question of accessibility?**

As with any publicly accountable institution, BALTIC claims to take accessibility issues seriously. Furthermore, as argued in Chapter Four, accessibility is a key issue for any space or venue hoping to attract members of the 'public' and go on to create a 'public space'. BALTIC claims to have a sophisticated approach to increasing public accessibility, stating:

Access means making the building and BALTIC's activities as welcoming, relevant, enjoyable and inspirational to as many people as possible. This is an ongoing organisational priority. There are different types of access that need to be considered, such as physical, intellectual, sensory and financial. (BALTIC, 2002c: 22)

Here, the importance of access in encouraging 'as many people as possible' to



use its facilities, also highlights that accessibility is measured by more than simply getting to BALTIC in a physical sense. Instead: 'To achieve equality of access, it is important that BALTIC consults its visitors and develops its facilities in order to continually improve the experience' (BALTIC, 2002c: 22).

There is an obvious issue with BALTIC's promise to consult its 'visitors'. To 'attract as many people as possible', it must develop its programme in accordance to both potential and already attending visitors. BALTIC does attempt to encourage specific 'non-users' to visit through its education and community programmes (to be discussed below), but it is important for it as a public institution to more actively recognise that it needs to target more non-attending members of 'the public' if it wants to broaden its appeal. Another issue is that throughout this research, none of the respondents knew of anyone within BALTIC that had carried out any visitor feedback research. The Head of Marketing, Cathryn Rowley, admitted: 'We really need to get to know our audience a lot better. The thing is that we just don't have the resources to carry out very much customer research except on a national level which the Newcastle Gateshead Initiative does for us' (pers. comm., 2005). Despite acknowledging the need to broaden contemporary art's appeal, BALTIC was doing nothing to discover what its current and potential visitors would need or desire to attract them to it.

#### **7.4: The mass appeal of high culture: Using art as a way of maintaining hierarchies?**

In attempting to attract visitors, BALTIC suffers from a problem associated with the activities it provides: 'On the whole the arts have failed to have an image of being fun, even for those who know a lot about them, and therefore appear inaccessible to those who do not have any expertise in arts-related matters' (Darton, 1985: 19; Evans, 2001). A number of interviewees commented that the art displayed in BALTIC was unfulfilling and not necessarily something that they would want to go and see regularly. As articulated by one interviewee:

I mean this contemporary art malarkey is a load of doodle. What on earth is it all about? Why would people want to come and see such



nonsense? At least if you go to the Laing [Art gallery in Newcastle] you get to see some nice paintings or work by people you've heard of, real artists.  
(George, pers. comm., 2006)

If BALTIC wants to be accessible and attractive to a diverse public, it has to offer facilities that are engaging for a wide range of people. However, it was not only the art's unattractiveness discouraging some, but its 'high-brow, complicated and overly challenging' nature (Lucy, pers. comm., 2006).

Several of the interviewees found the work at BALTIC disengaging or intimidating, leading often to a feeling of disenfranchisement. The way in which contemporary art and art culture leave many people perplexed, uninterested and hostile towards it is not uncommon. In fact, some have argued that the intentions of certain cultural domains are to exclude the less privileged members of the public. As Evans argues:

The dominance of cultural and cosmopolitan elite, described as the 'Professional-Managerial Class' by Ehrenrieche (1979), in the consumption of high-arts and national performing and visual arts audiences, has been a perennial feature of state-legitimated culture from Bourdieu's *cultural capitalists* and the petite bourgeoisie, to the conspicuous consumption and occupants in the post-industrial city-centre arts flagships [such as BALTIC] and cultural quarters.  
(2001: 11, emphasis in original)

It has been widely argued that much contemporary art is largely inaccessible to the general public and that it has been actively used to re-inscribe positions of privilege within the cultural hierarchy by being purposely exclusive (Fyfe and Ross, 1996). If BALTIC wants to 'encourage as many people as possible' to use its facilities, it must try to avoid the 'elitism', which Evans describes as a common feature of the cultural landscape.

Fyfe and Ross claim that: 'Family socialisation into museum visiting may constitute a mechanism of social reproduction - that is a mechanism through which the privilege of cultural capital is transmitted from one generation to the next' (1996: 133). Here, they are drawing on Bourdieu and Wacquant's (1992) argument that museums conceal the arbitrariness of taste and sanction elite taste as culture. In this way, Bourdieu believes that museums or cultural



institutions (such as BALTIC) are sites of symbolic violence, 'a violence which is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity' (1992: 167-8). MacDonald and Gordon (1994) use this assertion to highlight that the claims of art museums to display the message of universal genius to all are, it transpires, interwoven with cultural inequalities that the museum endorses. In sum, Bourdieu offers a formidable account of how class is accomplished through the medium of culture, of how taste is interwoven with inequality, of how elite cultural practices contribute to social reproduction. However, his *oeuvre* has attracted a sustained, often sympathetic, but critical response that it amounts to a covert determinism (Fyfe and Ross, 1996). Surely BALTIC would not necessarily be unappealing, unattractive and exclusionary for large swathes of society ostracised from the higher echelons of cultural privilege. BALTIC has agency, as do potential visitors, and despite perhaps being predisposed to certain cultural tastes, with sensitive programming such rigid distinctions between elite users and non-elite non-users could be broken down and attitudes changed.

Nevertheless, Gette argues that:

The ideal place for the encounters between art and the public is surely not the museum, which always selects its visitors, but outdoor space. It is rather naïve to think that the museum is open to everyone and that art is the focus of general interest. One must make a choice: either art is elitist - and why not - and seeks refuge in galleries and museums, or it shows its face on the streets and parks, which still doesn't make it popular. (2004: 287)

So BALTIC faces challenges in attracting 'as many people as possible' because of the limited appeal of contemporary art, or as Bickford argues because: 'The policing of function is a way of determining what kind of public is present' (Bickford, 2001:361). Whilst some people may never be interested in art, as a public institution, BALTIC has a responsibility to provide opportunities for all members of the public and therefore needs to know its potential users' needs and desires. Such restrictions do, however, question the extent to which arts can draw members of the 'general public' into debates about contemporary issues and concerns.



**Table 7.4: Deutsche on art and public space:**

‘Since any site has the potential to be transformed into a public or, for that matter, a private space, public art can be viewed as an instrument that either helps produce a public space or questions a dominated space that has been officially ordained as public. The function of public art, as Vita Acconci put it, ‘to make or break a public space’. But one effect of introducing the idea of public sphere into debates about public art overwhelms all others in the strength of its challenges to neutralising definitions; when critics redefine public art as work operating in or as a public sphere, the by now unanimous admonition to make art public becomes virtually synonymous with a demand for art’s politicisation. Art that is ‘public’ participates in, or creates a political space and is itself space where we assume political identities.’

(Deutsche, 2002: 288)

As highlighted by Deutsche, public art is often charged with the task of intervening in and/or stimulating public debate about pertinent issues facing contemporary society. In sum, public art is seen as a major contributor to the debates of the public sphere, acting as one point in which political beliefs and concerns are (re)produced and circulated. Some argue that contemporary art galleries provide arenas that can: ‘...encourage the sound of contradictory voices - voices that represent the diversity of people using the space - rather than aspire to myths of harmony based around essentialist concepts’ (Sharp et al., 2005: 1004). That the art gallery not only provides a space in which ‘contradictory voices’ can be heard, but also debated, highlights that notions of ‘the public’ and ‘public space’ should not be regarded as a consensual affair. The very fact that contemporary artists deal with issues such as abortion, sexuality, environmental issues, the rise of consumer culture - the list is endless - creates debate around their subject matter precisely because of its relation to everyday life and the variety of people and opinions that characterise it.

Deutsche (2002) worries that those who see public art as leading to enhancement of community miss the point, by presuming that the task of democracy is to settle, rather than sustain conflict. Some of BALTIC’s employees echoed this, for example, Vincentelli, a curator at BALTIC, argued that:



Contemporary art is a challenge that can make people question things and possibly feel uncomfortable by challenging their private beliefs. Art can be used to criticise some of the political aspects of contemporary society and can be used as a commentary. Art can be understood and interpreted in different ways.

(pers. comm., 2005)

Contemporary art is challenging, raising issues and questions for debate rather than providing answers. The extent to which BALTIC can act as a space in which issues are actively debated, or in which personal reflections of public debates are inspired is dependent on the individual's use of the space and the space's activities.

#### **7.4.1: Programming for the public: Knowing your audience**

Within museum studies, and cultural studies more broadly, there is a presumed relationship between art and democracy. Evans asserts that:

Whilst arguments for greater spatial consideration and integration of the arts and town planning have developed, the notion of equity in access and participation in the arts and cultural expression also presupposes a democratic system capable of responding to and meeting local needs - community and artistic. (2001: 10)

The qualities of accessibility and participation are key criteria against which cultural institutions will be tested when contemplating whether they function successfully as 'public spaces'. Deutsche insightfully notes:

Judging, then, by the number of references to public space in contemporary aesthetic discourse, the art world is taking democracy seriously. Public art terminology frequently alludes to democracy as a form of government, but also to a general democratic spirit of egalitarianism: Do the works avoid 'elitism'? Are they 'accessible'? (2002: 269)

The opposite of 'accessible', as discussed in relation to culture, is often crudely considered as 'elitist', and policy seems above all to be directed at the avoidance of this (Warnock and Wallinger, 2005: 10).<sup>118</sup> New Labour asserts that in order to earn state support, art must be 'accessible', but it must also be

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<sup>118</sup> It is not the aims of this thesis to set out the problematic nature of conceptualising a clear divide between high and low culture. However, it is important to acknowledge that such distinctions were often operationalised by the respondents incorporated into this research.



‘subversive and challenging’ (Minton, 2003). Above all, it must somehow contribute to ‘community’ (Warnock and Wallinger, 2005: 10). Marsh evaluates BALTIC’s success in achieving these ambitions:

The overwhelming success of both [BALTIC and Tate Modern] could signify a reengagement of the general public with contemporary art, fed by ‘democratic’, participatory approaches to exhibiting and programming art that make the museum more accessible to the various mixed publics it serves. (2004: 92)

This chapter considers the extent to which BALTIC has had such an ‘overwhelming success’ in making its activities ‘more accessible’ through ‘participatory approaches to exhibiting and performing art’.

As Zukin argues: ‘Culture is a powerful means of controlling cities. As sources of images and memories it symbolises ‘who belongs’ in specific places’ (2001: 1). BALTIC is a cultural powerhouse; therefore, it is important to investigate ‘who belongs’ in this space through how its activities are programmed. This is significant as: ‘By acknowledging that a museum has a public charge (with a duty to serve its public), a reconceptualisation of exhibiting and programming practices around accessible, experientially progressive ideals is mandated’ (Ryan, 2004: 105).<sup>119</sup> By carefully examining the exhibiting and programming practices of BALTIC, the activities provided in the art house will be critically analysed in relation to their involvement in encouraging different members of ‘the public’ to use the facilities. Whilst there has been a general trend towards a more egalitarian provision of cultural activities for all members of ‘the public’, as highlighted by Zukin: ‘Such high-culture institutions as art museums and symphony orchestras have been driven to expand and diversify their offerings to appeal to a broader public’ (2000: 2). BALTIC’s success in achieving this is not pre-given, but poses a challenge for the institution.

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<sup>119</sup> Ryan argues that: ‘Browse through any brochure, policy document or mission statement from the culture industry and you will find the same words and phrases popping up over and over again; ‘accessibility’ and ‘relevance’, ‘promoting social inclusion and cultural diversity, ‘empowering the learning and creative society’, ‘putting people first’ (2004: 16). When a group of people come to share a fixed language, the language can reveal much about the thinking of the group. Precision of meaning and the clear statement of aims are subordinated to another set of concerns: to insinuate a set of messages, the meaning of which often lies beyond the words themselves. The language creates a world of its own, related more to how people might want to view things than how they really are (Lees, 2003a; Ryan, 2004).



Whilst housing a contemporary art factory in a familiar local building has been argued by some to make BALTIC an alluring venue, such transformation brings with it a set of challenges (Higgins, 2005). One of the key concerns of the programming team for BALTIC is forcefully recognised in the work of Kosuth:

Working directly with a public space - framed with other meanings than those associated with the specialised institutions of art - presents a new challenge of a particular kind. The special task in doing such work is to make certain that it is appropriate to the context.  
(2004: 189)

Whilst some claimed that the East Gateshead Quayside should welcome any urban regeneration being carried out there (Howe, pers. comm., 2005), others believed that because the site was one of industrial heritage, any development must be responsible to the local community (Watts, 2005). How the programming team went about tackling such challenges warrants discussion.

BALTIC has always claimed to strive towards increasing public participation in and attendance of its art program. It aims to do this in several ways:

Well the Director creates a vision of the art gallery, which is suitable to a broad range of tastes; the marketing team ensure that a broad range of people hear about what's going on; the curators try to make the work accessible to everyone; and, the education team have formal programs linked to education centres and an outreach team which goes into the local community to get to people that we can't.  
(Thomas, pers. comm., 2005)

The interactions between the multiple actors and stakeholders (re)producing the space of BALTIC in different ways demands close attention. As the following section will argue, BALTIC's designers, managers, regulators and users conceive, perceive and live it in different ways. The extent to which the combinatory effect of such dynamics articulates BALTIC as a 'public space' must be explored.

#### **7.4.2: Direct(or)ly encouraging public participation through programming**

One of the most notable transformations that took place whilst carrying out research at BALTIC was the change in Directors. In 2005, Peter Doreshenko, replaced a very short serving Steven Snoddy as Director and, as stated by one



of the curators at BALTIC:

Peter has a very different vision to what Sunes had. He wants to get much more involved with the local community and make more of a direct link with local people by getting the programming team out there to talk to them face-to-face. (Anon, pers. comm., 2005)

Most employees believed that whilst Nordgren wanted to encourage the local public to get involved in the activities at BALTIC, he failed to put effort into achieving such goals.<sup>120</sup> From the predominantly Nordic-based exhibitions Nordgren directed, it was clear that he had his own agenda, welcoming the public in on his own terms.

The Director's conception for BALTIC fundamentally influences whether it can generate far-reaching public appeal. BALTIC's Head of Education stated that: 'The influence of the Director is absolutely massive. Peter wants to bring in some exciting shows, shows that people may have actually heard of in the Sunday newspapers' (Thomas, 2005). Doreshenko acknowledged that BALTIC had to introduce more well-known exhibitions to encourage the local public to become the art-going public that BALTIC hoped for. The space of the BALTIC, it was believed, could be managed by the Director in a way that encouraged broader sections of the public to use BALTIC as a 'public space'. This was captured in Higgins' report in *The Guardian*, which includes snippets from an interview with Doreshenko (Table 7.4.2):

<p><b>Table 7.4.2: Higgins' Report on BALTIC's Director:</b></p> <p>Mr Doroshenko plans to introduce blockbuster shows by household names such as Andy Warhol and Roy Lichtenstein to combat what one commentator has called a "warped elitism" in the programme. He was critical of the vision of Sunes Nordgren, the Swedish founding director of the gallery: "I don't know whether it was obscure, but it was for a small audience. For me it's about enlarging that a hundredfold." He will invite artists to create an enormous skateboarding ramp inside the gallery, and will commission work in the Newcastle United football ground, St James' Park, to reach out to Tynesiders. "These people aren't ever going to come into the BALTIC," he said. "I'm realistic about that. So we're going to go to them."</p> <p>(Higgins, C. <i>The Guardian</i>, 20.10.2005)</p>
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<sup>120</sup> Nodgren paid lip service to his encouragement of local participation and instead wanted to attract an arts-specialist audience, believing as Stevenson-Read stated that 'he might be in Gateshead but he might-as-well be in London' (pers. comm., 2005).



Doreshenko has succeeded in developing a varied program with anything from popular photographers such as Sam Taylor-Wood's photographic and film work, including her video portrait of David Beckham; to the highly political *Kienholz* exhibition, which included strong political statements; to *Spank The Monkey*, which incorporated a real life skateboard ramp for visitors to use; and, a naked public participation photography session with the world in/famous Spencer Tunick. It is not the intention to comment in detail about all of the exhibitions and activities provided at BALTIC, but it is important to highlight the increasingly diverse nature of the exhibitions. Doreshenko has produced a programme that caters for the multiple publics – spatially located and socially positioned – within reach of BALTIC's remit. However, the *provision* of a broad and inclusive programme does not necessarily ensure the *production* of a successful public space. Nor does an improved programme translate into public satisfaction.

There are as many opinions about the quality of the art BALTIC displays as there are visitors. One interviewee believed that BALTIC's *Spank the Monkey* exhibition had tried to embrace subcultures by privatising and commodifying skateboarding and graffiti, taking away the subversive nature of the practices that attracted them to it in the first place:

An art museum is not for me, I don't care if they give us lot [skaters] a skate ramp. It's just not like the real thing at all. It's a bit of a fake. I certainly won't be coming back. Graffiti and boarding is about taking over the streets and making them your own, not being in a museum.  
(Phillip, pers. comm., 2005)

This quote is reminiscent of the territoriality encountered in the responses of some of the queer users of the Pink Triangle. Subcultural groups often want to 'take over' and create their own spaces, sometimes for long durations (e.g. The Pink Triangle) and other times temporarily (e.g. skateboarding).

As Chapter Five discussed, some groups use 'tactical' resistance to highlight and challenge dominant representations of space for a short time. Tactical uses of space are often used to dispute understandings of space as a stable and monolithic entity, rather than as attempts to strategically replace such



dominant codes with other permanent forms of coding (De Certeau, 1984). It is the creativity and insurgency involved in transgressing normative understandings of space and codes of conduct, and reproducing an alternative reading of space, that inspires many skateboarders (Borden, 2001). Doreshenko's promise to encourage, what one of BALTIC's curators described as, 'work with subcultures', was viewed by some as patronising, out of touch and tokenistic.

Many of the young people interviewed who visited the exhibition, disliked the fact that the underground nature of their hobbies, the very thing which gave them their 'urban cool', had been mainstreamed despite cult-figures such as Banksy exhibiting in the show.<sup>121</sup> However, others felt that such relevant exhibitions gave them some kind of ownership over the space, as stated by one young girl: 'Yeah it's really cool to have all this stuff here. Now my parents can see that graffiti and skateboarding isn't all that bad man' (Clare, pers. comm., 2005). Whether or not *Spank the Monkey* would change Clare's parents' minds about graffiti and skateboarding was unresolved, however, Clare's attitude towards contemporary art was challenged, as she now believed that BALTIC did perhaps have something to offer her.<sup>122</sup>

It is impossible to account for every visitor's opinion of the exhibitions held at BALTIC; BALTIC's 'public' is divided over whether or not it likes certain exhibitions or whether it likes BALTIC - because of its naturally conflictual and heterogeneous nature. This is precisely because BALTIC's 'public' is not a homogeneous 'it', but a diverse – if restricted - 'them'. However, certain artists and exhibitions hold wider appeal than others do. Whereas the *Kienholz* exhibition and the *British Art Show* were considered major coups by the arts world, a number of local residents described the former as obscene, disgusting or just plain bad taste, and the latter as a whole load of rubbish and a waste of space. In sum, BALTIC's heterogeneous public, as would be expected, have

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<sup>121</sup> Banksy is a well-known pseudo-anonymous English graffiti artist. His work often has satirical undertones that encompass issues around politics, culture and ethics. His street art, which combines graffiti with a distinctive stenciling technique, has appeared in London and in cities around the world.

<sup>122</sup> For an overview of the discussion of graffiti as art, see Iveson (2007).



diverse tastes and interests – they are far from a homogenous group in their opinions surrounding the different exhibitions displayed at BALTIC. For this project, the most interesting exhibition produced over the duration of the research was the Spencer Tunick exhibition, due to the highly relevant nature of Tunick's topic. Tunick's work focuses on subject of 'public space', interrogating what it is, how it is created and why it is important.

Tunick's exhibition involved 2,000 volunteers making their way down to the BALTIC on a spring morning, depositing their clothes inside the building and publicly revealing their private body.<sup>123</sup> Despite not being able to make the actual production of the pieces, I followed the voluminous media coverage it generated. I interviewed a participant who summed up the event stating:

The Spencer Tunick exhibition captured people's minds and got them interested in how the divide between life and art is never so clear as many would believe. There we were. All of us standing together united in the first instance by our interest in the work, and secondly our excitement, intrigue and pride in taking part. Thirdly, and most of all, being so exposed in public, our private displayed for all to see, our bodies becoming art. (Jill, pers. comm., 2006)

The photos produced by Tunick challenged the normative values of the space. The public spaces around BALTIC were recoded as spaces of art and under the regulation of the artist were experienced and used as such.<sup>124</sup>

One thing that is so striking about Tunick's work, and which holds much relevance to the focus of this thesis, is the fact that others working within BALTIC deal directly with the topic of 'public space'. The example of Tunick, illustrates how artists not only transform public spaces such as art institutions or public squares that house public monuments, but also make them their primary subject. Tunick's work sets out to challenge the dominant representations of space producing normative patterns of spatial practice in the public spaces of the Western world. He has carried out photographic expeditions of thousands

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<sup>123</sup> This is not the usual way in which local people from the area are known for wearing very little clothing – Geordie's are renowned for wearing little more than a beer jacket when out in the Bigg Market on a Saturday night.

<sup>124</sup> Tunick has faced public debates with Police authorities, most notably in New York, where his 'art' was perceived as a perverse and illegal profanity for which he faced arrest. This highlights the divergent norms structuring cities throughout the world.



of naked people in locations such as New York, Paris, Barcelona and Gateshead. The work contains public nudity, which is often illegal and considered indecent, something that should be restricted to the 'private realm' in societies throughout the world. Simultaneously, due to the highly exposed nature of the work, it receives a lot of public press and stimulates public discussions and contest over its value and appropriateness. Tunick's work connects a broader, spatially distant 'public' into debate and discussion about what should and should not be allowed to happen in, through and across public space.

So public art is not just 'art' displayed in 'public', it can stir public debate, involve the public and test public norms, or at least make people question them. 'Public art' can make us question what the term 'public' means, what it constitutes and who decides upon how such classifications are made in the first place.

#### **7.4.3: Curating a public space?**

Whilst the importance of the artists and the gallery Director in (re)creating artistic experience in the cultural bastions of the contemporary era is well-documented (MacDonald and Gordon, 1994), the role of the curator is often overlooked. However, curators are central in programming BALTIC's exhibitions and, hence, to the everyday workings of the institution and the space it occupies and (re)creates. The curators at BALTIC not only influence the types of artists invited to work at BALTIC, but influence how the work is displayed and produce the information guides for the public.

The extent to which members of the public are attracted to exhibitions varies greatly and is dependent upon personal taste. However, it also varies depending on the extent curators value public participation and attendance. As stated by one of BALTIC's curators, Ronald van der Sompeles:

I think that because BALTIC is a public institution, as a curator I have to ensure that the work I exhibit or commission is accessible to the public. This is not the case with all of the places I have worked in, but here it is very important. (pers. comm., 2005)



Whereas the role of the curator cannot be denied, the overall remit of BALTIC as a public institution appears to inform most of the choices taken about BALTIC's artistic program. Whilst van der Somple acknowledges that 'not all places are like this', it was reiterated by other curators that a major part of their role was to provide publicly accessible and attractive activities and events. In turn, the way in which a public space is perceived, conceived and practiced by the key regulators and managers of BALTIC has a substantial effect on the level of 'publicness' - in terms of access, participation and engagement - facilitated.

BALTIC's curators saw themselves as 'facilitators and enablers of public engagement with art' (van der Somple, pers. comm., 2005), providing the public with an opportunity to visit attractive art exhibitions and the information needed to engage with them. For example, when the Kienholz exhibition was brought to the BALTIC, despite being challenging, it was made more accessible to the general public through the provision of different 'levels' of information, 'catering for groups from the under-12s to the arts specialist audience' (Anon, pers. comm., 2006). The provision of different visitor guides reflects the curator's attempts to engage BALTIC's diverse 'public', acting as a material reminder of the heterogeneity of this group. However, despite the provision of multiple guides, some people still find the art intimidating. The worry of not being able to understand the complexity of the pieces presented by the artists perturbed a number of visitors, putting some potential visitors off before they even got the chance to walk through the door.

#### **7.4.4: Marketing a public space?**

BALTIC's Crew are the team charged with being 'front of house, the first group of people that BALTIC's visitors will probably come into contact with' (Stevenson-Read, pers. comm., 2005). Located within the Visitor Services Department, their role is: 'To provide visitors with the best possible assistance to enhance the quality of their visit, and encourage them not only to make repeat visits themselves, but also encourage others to come' (Dave, pers.



comm., 2005).<sup>125</sup> Perhaps the most surprising thing about Visitor Services at BALTIC is that it only opened when Doreshenko became Director in 2005. The incorporation of a visitor services desk within cultural venues is nothing new; as one of the curators said: 'I suggested that BALTIC have a main desk where the visitors could go with queries about the art, future exhibitions and pick up info. I mean it's crazy not having one, you need to give the public that service' (van der Somple, pers. comm., 2005). Doreshenko's drive to improve relations with the public changed BALTIC's artistic programme, but it also physically changed the building and the Crew's roles.

The Head of Visitor Services reliably informed me that: 'We are keen to have a staff that engage with visitors and talk about the work. Whereas Sunes wanted The Crew to be art experts, Peter is much more focussed on ensuring that they are peoples people' (Stevenson-Read, 2005). The change in focus of the importance of Crew members as 'arts experts' to 'peoples people' signifies Doreshenko's aim to increase and broaden public attraction to BALTIC by putting the user at the centre of the everyday workings of the space. Whilst carrying out participant observation in BALTIC I noted how:

The Crew here are very easily identified in their bright red uniform. They seem to patrol the gallery space watching the visitors very carefully but not in the style of a security guard, there is no visible hostility on their faces but an openness as they seem to loiter with the hope of engaging the visitors in conversation about the art.

(2005)

The Crew were conceptualised as central in BALTIC's attempt to make the space and its displays more inviting for, and accessible to, the general public. By encouraging members of the public to engage with the art works on display, and build user confidence, it was hoped that the BALTIC could create a returning public and, improve the arts capacity of the local public more broadly.

For some members of the public, The Crew played a fundamental part in their learning more about the art on display and helped to encourage engagement

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<sup>125</sup> Good publicity from the local public was viewed as highly important for BALTIC as even from the start, key members of the local community were personally invited to visit. This included taxi drivers and hairdressers – some of the major communicators of local information due to the volume of people that they meet.



with the work. However, for others they were intimidating and a reminder of the codes of conduct operating within the space:

Some people like to come up and talk to us and ask questions, but we just scare the hell out of others, they think we're the elite artist crowd and don't want us to talk to them. It's often about their lack of confidence in engaging with the work. Some people think we're security guards who are just there to say 'don't touch that'.

(Christie, pers. comm., 2005)

When catering for a broad range of users, it is essential to acknowledge that space, and the practices and processes regulating the space will be interpreted, mediated and understood in diverse ways. BALTIC has strategies in place to engage with a range of different groups, however, the success of these strategies will be as dependent upon how visitors want to *use* the space, as on what *regulation* and *management* mechanisms are put in place.

#### 7.4.5: Re-‘art’iculating space as public

The role of artists and their work on the everyday nature of BALTIC must be taken into account when considering the dynamics constituting it as a ‘public space’. The pressure of working in a public institution is something that can directly influence an artist’s work. As noted by Kosuth:

There is a kind of social contract to working in a space shared by many, and the artist has some responsibility to provide a level of attainable meaning. The task is to do that and not compromise one’s problematic as an artist. An important consideration and that which has made it a special challenge, is that such work must be accessible to a non-specialised audience, while, at the same time, providing an enriching cultural contribution as it makes a serious addition to the body of my work.

(2004: 189)

All of the artists that work within BALTIC are reminded of the ‘accessibility’ characteristic at the centre of the institution’s mission. As highlighted in Kosuth’s statement, this brings with it ‘some responsibility’ and this responsibility has to be incorporated into artistically-credible work. However, some artists doubt the possibility of creating such a hybrid.

A number of artists are deeply sceptical about institutions, such as BALTIC, that aim to make contemporary art appealing to the masses. In an interview with



Marcel Duchamp, Craig notes him stating:

Instead of forcing the public to approach the work, we beg for its approval. What is so boring about art as it is understood today is this necessity of having the public on one's side. The public makes everything mediocre. Art has nothing to do with democracy.

(2004: 92)

The democratic take on art, sees accessibility as key attribute of the overall programme. It is something that a number of artists do not appreciate; instead believing that art is something that need not necessarily cater for all. For example, Gette comments that: 'It makes no difference to me if the production of art is reserved for a small circle. I am not a socially committed artist' (2004: 288). Some artists even question the value of 'public art': 'Does art work that wants to do good do good? Is it fair to expect work to be social work as well as art work? And does art in the public interest really interest the public?' (Arlelen Raven, 1993: 1). It is not the intention of this thesis to critically explore the benefits of public art, but it is important to acknowledge that different people will have varied experiences of art depending upon their own circumstances and the types of work that they engage with.

Whilst artists need not always be socially committed in order to produce and exhibit work at BALTIC, the artists have to be aware of the potential social impacts of their work, by carefully considering the visiting public: 'Any artist that we invite to work here must show an interest in public involvement and in order to become an artist in residence, the individual must be willing to actively work with the visitors or outreach groups' (Vincentelli, pers. comm., 2005). BALTIC has an artist in residency programme, which enables individual artists to be funded by BALTIC to produce work in and around the institution, but they must work closely within BALTIC's formal and community education programmes. The main reason for ensuring a consideration of the public in the production of work is highlighted by Beck, who notes that: 'How is people's delight in engaging with art ever to be rekindled if no one identifies with it?' (2004: 131). Beck summarises BALTIC's motivation in ensuring that artists consider the visiting public, because if they fail to do this, how will they begin to encourage people to come to BALTIC?



### **7.5: Bringing the public to art: BALTIC's formal education programme**

BALTIC's position as an institution, is that the arts-interested audience will naturally visit by their own accord, but that certain sections of the community need to be actively encouraged to visit the old flourmill and partake in the activities offered under its new function. BALTIC's Education and Community Programme Teams are directly involved in trying to incorporate 'hard to reach' groups within the local area into its activities. This section describes and evaluates the strategies and practices these teams have developed to incorporate a broader 'public' into BALTIC's programme.

BALTIC has a team of people dedicated to the construction and delivery of what is known in-house as its Formal Education Programme. The team is one of two within the Education Department and is responsible for delivering a programme for local education facilities such as schools, universities and colleges. The programmes relate directly to the syllabus from which the students are studying or the exhibitions on display at the BALTIC. They aim to advance the appeal of contemporary art, whilst simultaneously facilitating a broader and deeper engagement with the concepts behind it. BALTIC have purposely targeted formal education programmes in the hope that they will be able to encourage young members of the 'public' to use the facilities provided – giving them the opportunity to develop the social tastes and cultural capital which they believe are essential in the maintenance of an arts interested public.

The arts programme creates a direct link with the local community and gets hundreds of otherwise unlikely students to use the facilities at BALTIC. Emma Thomas, Head of Education, outlined the range of activities provided to formal education institutions:

We are very busy and we run a lot of programmes simultaneously. We do anything from workshops, to school visits, to tours of the building, to participation in the actual creation of work which will be displayed here. We even have information packs to send out to the schools if we aren't able to cope with the demand.

(pers. comm., 2005)

On most of my visits to BALTIC, I would see groups of students being given



guided tours around the art galleries or taking part in workshops in the artist studios. The students, more often than not, appeared animated by their trip to BALTIC – or at least their day off school.

BALTIC is so popular with public education institutions that it no longer advertises its formal programme as it is inundated with requests for participation in its projects. However, despite the fact that the education program is a widely used and broad public resource, the educational groups that tend to use the facilities provided are a selective group. As stated by Emma Thomas:

It's usually one particular teacher that is really enthusiastic and gets her class involved. There are also obviously access issues as not all schools can afford the transport to and from here. Whilst we go out to some schools, even the Director and the programming team, not everyone knows what's available. We're far too busy to cope with such demands. (pers. comm., 2005)

BALTIC is a limited resource, therefore, the private connections that have developed from the original public advertisement of the educational activities, has made any ongoing public incorporation into the facilities highly dependent on an already existing connection.

BALTIC has forged strong connections with local educational institutions, for example, Gateshead College and Northumbria University. The Formal Education Team said that making these connections was relatively easy. Such institutions are well connected to their locales, and well positioned to take up the opportunity to get involved in activities such as those provided within the programme. Education facilities have a clear role, purpose and remit, they can mobilise as a group, a collective, to the benefit of their members. However, some sub-sections of the local public are neither so well positioned, nor so easy to reach.

#### **7.5.1: Bringing art to the public and back again: BALTIC's outreach community programme**

The second group within the Education Department at BALTIC is the Community Development Team. They are responsible for developing outreach



programmes for marginal groups that would not normally be able to access art, due to either their limited educational, social or cultural capital, or the restrictions upon their means to travel. As Warnock and Wallinger note:

The language of accessibility has led to an almost unconscious adoption of Reithian values - the mission to educate, entertain and instruct – which have permeated from outreach projects to the galleries and museums.<sup>126</sup> (2005: 11)

The BALTIC offers a wide range of community outreach programs, incorporating an artist-in-residence program into its constantly changing exhibition programme.

BALTIC emphasised the importance of fostering relationships between artists, the art and the public from the outset in its pre-opening program, which occurred while the building was still under renovation from 1999 to 2002. This included an ambitious program of large scale commissioned public works, offsite exhibitions, artists' residencies, publications and educational seminars (Marsh, 2004). Through what are known as 'Participate' initiatives, members from the local community and beyond are invited to engage with the resident artists and collaborate with fellow participants in the creation of artwork, which in turn is exhibited or presented within BALTIC. For example, 'The Way We Live' project worked collaboratively with a group of six young people and their families living close to Peterlee Pavilion (a threatened building) in East Gateshead to research and create a documentary that explored 'the impact and the vision of contemporary modern architecture and town planning on the way we live' (BALTIC, 2002b: 13). The program goals were to teach the participants new skills in filmmaking, editing and interview techniques. The completed film was screened at BALTIC and within the local community centre, promoting access and dialogue beyond the art centre's walls.

On the BALTIC website, it stated that because the Peterlee Pavilion was a threatened building, 'it is therefore a poignant time to work with the local

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<sup>126</sup> John Reith was appointed director-general of the BBC in the 1920s. Reith had a mission to educate and improve the audience and, under his leadership, the BBC developed a reputation for serious programmes.



community in researching its history as well as its daily life' (BALTIC website, 13.04.2002). Rather than challenging our aesthetic experience in the everyday, as some have espoused (Dewey, 1980), or by extension, disempowering audiences from actively engaging with art (or using it as a tool for communication): 'Places such as BALTIC can provide the context and opportunity to promote, explore, create, and reflect upon art, and in turn, cultivate aesthetic and artistic impulses in their visiting publics' (Marsh, 2004: 95-6). BALTIC firmly supports the production of a space where 'the public' can encounter *and* create art, stating from the very beginning that: 'The community exists but you as an institution don't belong to that community until you put some roots down and start having a dialogue' (BALTIC, 2002f: 77).

BALTIC works with members of the public that have been disenfranchised from society, developing workshops that work directly with homeless groups, drug addicts, prisoners and young offenders. They also visit old people's residential homes and hold a special programme for the over-50s who it believes have more time to embrace art. The purpose of the outreach projects operated by BALTIC are to specifically target groups that: 'Feel a little bit left behind with the way society is. They either feel unwelcome in or unable to join in the activities of the cultural venues of their local area' (Anon, pers. comm., 2005). A number of the groups targeted are those that literally cannot physically get to BALTIC, or feel unable to visit it because of a lack of confidence or low self-esteem. As noted by Judy Watts: 'The public is thought to be anyone who comes into the BALTIC and also the people out there in the local community that don't' (pers. comm., 2005). One of the ways in which the programme at BALTIC hopes to encourage the people involved in outreach projects to get involved in the activities inside of BALTIC is to transform the building into a community centre, a place where members of the local community feel at home.

### **7.5.2: BALTIC as community centre**

On the one hand, BALTIC is viewed as an arts space: 'BALTIC is an art factory. It is a place where artists and audiences from all over the world will come to work, to create, to take part in the art of our time' (BALTIC, 2002a). However,



on the other hand, BALTIC is conceived as a community art centre: 'As a new place for the production, promotion and presentation of contemporary art, BALTIC will act as a meeting place for artists and public life' (BALTIC, 2002c). In sum, BALTIC is viewed as a place that should not only embody the classic traits of an artistic space, but should also incorporate into its being a public and/or communal dimension.

One of the curators at BALTIC outlined the role of the centre in the public realm as being the facilitation of contemporary encounters and dialogue with and through the arts:

This is why we need places like BALTIC; somewhere to experience art with others in an ongoing process of discussion and interpretation. BALTIC is a meeting place, a site for connections and confrontations between artists and the public, in an atmosphere of open minds, nothing is impossible. (Vincentelli, pers. comm., 2005)

Whilst the extent to which BALTIC has been successful in the creation of 'an atmosphere of open minds' where 'nothing is impossible' is highly dubious, the way in which it has aimed to put the public at the centre of its vision is indisputable. As described by Marsh:

BALTIC is likened to a community centre, a 'meeting place', which functions to bring people and art together; a site for the 'production, presentation and experience of art'. The BALTIC unites art-making with exhibiting and participating with viewing, dissolving barriers between cultural institutions, the artists, and the audience, where the artists can act as curators, and the audience becomes artists. The BALTIC also emphasises its role as a community resource, with a computer learning centre set up at a local library, and partnerships with local universities for teacher professional development and graduate study internships. (2004: 99)

Through the teaching programme and the graduate internships, BALTIC hopes that its resources, which are invested in these groups, will be spread throughout the wider public. In the case of teachers, this is through the dissemination of their skills to classes at school, and for the graduate interns, through the exhibition of their work to wider audiences as their career progresses. However, it is through welcoming local members of the community into BALTIC as a community centre that it hopes to create a returning public: 'Where they



can pop down and have a cup of tea in the café, or a look out from the viewing tower and hopefully end up in the gallery's at some point in their trip' (Judy Watts, pers. comm. 2005). The way in which 'publicness' relies on the continuous circulation of people, ideas, activities and opinion in order to develop into a lively and well-functioning public space is something which makes sure that BALTIC tries to appeal to a broad section of the community.<sup>127</sup>

A key way BALTIC has tried to develop the notion of a community centre is also through their 'Participate' programmes. The programmes, in which members of the community can participate in the production of the art displayed in BALTIC, is seen to give 'the public' some kind of ownership over the space. BALTIC has actively moved away from conceiving their visitors as *users* of the space - distanced observers of the art displayed there - and has created a more formative role for the visitors at certain times, seeing them as the *participants in* and *creators* or *subjects* of the art. Whether it is public involvement in the creation of corporeal structures through Anthony Gormley's *Domain Fields* exhibition; the skateboarders activating the ramps of the *Spank The Monkey* show; the participants in the photographs taken by Spencer Tunick and displayed in the gallery's of BALTIC; or the production of work in *The Way We Live* exhibition, which was produced by some local community members of Peterlee and displayed both within the locality and at BALTIC, members of the public are put at the centre of the *production* of art.

The way the public enter into conversation with the regulators and programmers of BALTIC through their participation in the art exhibitions is significant. The movement away from *user* of space to *participant* in its production is related to Lefebvre's suspicion of the idea of user: 'The word 'user' (usage)...has something vague - a vaguely suspect - about it. 'User of what?' one tends to wonder...The user's space is *lived* - not represented (or conceived)' (1991: 362,

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<sup>127</sup> Head Community Officer, Jude Watts, highlighted the problematic nature of the term used to structure her programme namely, 'Community'. She stated that: 'I don't think that it should be called the Community Programme, but what else could it be called? Community is a highly contested term that is often mobilised on behalf of quite reactionary political interests (Anderson, 1991).



emphasis in original).<sup>128</sup> Forty (2000) has illustrated how users signify occupiers, inhabitants, even clients - 'those who would not normally be expected to formulate the overall brief' - suggesting a powerless, even disadvantaged role for the depersonalised 'users' and the ungrateful, problematic 'non-user'. The movement towards participation at BALTIC sees the 'participants' space as represented and conceived throughout the stages of (re)production and display. Whilst this is only the case for a certain number of exhibitions, it is important to note this fundamental change from the traditional museum to the contemporary art centre that is BALTIC. However, it is also important to note that the 'lived' aspect of user space does actually form a significant part of the everyday space.

BALTIC is, however, not simply a community centre for the local public, but can be considered as a community centre for the arts-interested community worldwide. BALTIC provides a worldwide online public in the form of its archive, known in-house as the 'brain of BALTIC'. BALTIC's website has a high hit number and is used throughout the world by the arts-interested public. Perhaps the best example of this is that when local artist Barnaby Furnas exhibited in Gateshead, he noted that: 'My work was loved more online in New York than it was in London, but the thing that really mattered was that it was the people of Gateshead who seemed to get the most out of it' (Furnas et al., 2005).

Whilst the BALTIC has a local, regional, national and international remit, aiming to serve a spatially distant 'arts interested public', it is the archive facility which seems the most successful in attracting national and international cyber-visitors. BALTIC's archive publicly circulates information about its exhibitions, the exhibitors, the building itself and the institution, illustrating that in contemporary society, members of an online public do not rely on spatial proximity to engage with one another. There is a well-used discussion forum that allows for this, highlighting the need to take seriously the material and immaterial dimensions

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<sup>128</sup> The paternalistic view of *users* (and critically 'non-users') of cultural and other community facilities has been long established in the essentially normative provision of civic amenities, and in the design and planning professions themselves.



of public space and their interrelation (see Chapter Eight).

## 7.6: (Pre)programming public space: Maintaining the rhythm of public conduct in BALTIC

One of the most striking things about a visit to BALTIC is that regardless of the activities taking place there, the types of social interaction, or more typically non-interaction, being enacted are seemingly similar. Looking to the work of Tonkiss, it is possible to identify the way in which BALTIC's visitors appear to operate around: 'Unspoken codes that govern people's conduct in public places, the tacit rules which give order to the informal behaviour in public which imply a momentary and minimal relation' (2005: 69). It is possible to surmise that when people visit the gallery spaces, they more often than not only engage in conversation with people that they already know. The way in which strangers are handled in the gallery space is very similar to the way in which Simmel talks about how strangers are encountered on city streets, with indifference, as visitors more often than not assume a solitary identity.<sup>129</sup> According to Simmel: 'The indifference to that which is spatially close is simply a protective device without which one would be mentally ground down and destroyed in the metropolis' (Simmel and Frisby, 1997: 154).

BALTIC is not the metropolis, but it is a cultural venue within contemporary urban living. More so, the types of indifference that operate within the gallery spaces are similar to those Simmel describes. However, Tonkiss argues that such non-relations must be thought of as *social relations*, stating:

What appears as dissociation is in fact a basic form of urban sociation, one that allows us to coexist with all these largely unknown others. Refusing interaction is not, therefore, merely a matter of social withdrawal, but is instead a primary condition for urban social

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<sup>129</sup> The idea of solitude or separation as a social condition is a theme we often find in urban social theory, and has its classic statement in the work of German sociologist Georg Simmel. In *The Metropolis and Mental Life*, Simmel remarks the tendency to reserve among people in the city, 'a reserve that shades not only into indifference, but, more often than we are aware...a slight aversion, mutual strangeness and repulsion' (1997: 179). This notion of indifference is cut through by ambivalence. For Simmel, relations of indifference or even aversion are fundamentally *social* relations in that they offer the only feasible way of being together with countless strangers in the crowded spaces of the city. Adopting such an attitude enables individuals to negotiate a teeing social space and at the same time preserve some degree of 'psychological private property' (Simmel, 1997: 163).



life, securing individual calm together with relative social peace  
(2005: 11)

Within the BALTIC, people appear to avoid direct contact with one another in an attempt to find a 'social peace' in which they can reflect upon the art with which they are engaging. Because art demands some space and time for private reflection, this could be argued as being fundamental in the gallery space.

A number of BALTIC's employees believed that: 'Contemporary art isn't about finding answers it's about raising issues. People coming in understand the work in relation to their own experiences' (Thomas, pers. comm., 2005). The way visitors (and participants) bring with them their own situation, circumstances and personal histories means that they need the time and space for personal reflection. Obviously, some pieces of work demand more private situations, in which case the number of people allowed into a room at any point is restricted and benches are provided for people to feel comfortable staying at sensitive pieces for longer. Interviewees confirmed the need for time and space to negotiate artwork. As Hegeswich notes: 'Artist and viewer meet in the artwork. Individuals encounter each other. Or at least, that's how it ought to be' (2004: 114). Some visitors commented on the way in which the artwork would make them contemplate their own life and how they would be drawn into an internal conversation with the artists. Others believed that their inability to understand the work would make them withdraw into themselves and contemplate their lives without relating directly to the artwork, whilst some stated that they would come to BALTIC purely for private time in which they could take stock of how their life was going. In sum, the gallery spaces are spaces in which visitors can have a direct relation with the artist, their subject matter and the art they produced, or simply with themselves.

BALTIC holds lectures and public seminars on Thursday evenings in which a limited number of people (approximately 100) can come together to discuss the artwork that is on display at that given time. The attendees of these sessions are more often than not white, middle-class men; arts professionals and students; members of the BALTIC team; and the artist(s) currently exhibiting at



BALTIC. After attending several of these sessions, it is relatively easy to understand why. The exclusionary nature of these sessions can be measured in the academic and specialist language used to discuss and debate the given topic and the obvious social and cultural capital of the given attendees. It is unlikely that the 'general public' would be able to tap into the critical literature, cultural theory and French philosophy that saturates these sessions. In fact, the way in which different sections of BALTIC's programme appeals to such different audiences means that it is often only ever people with similar social and cultural capital to themselves that visitors will have real discussion and engagement with. BALTIC, like the Pink Triangle, has a spatio-temporal divide, which operates in accordance to the different activities provided for varying publics.<sup>130</sup>

## Conclusion

This chapter has investigated the extent to which BALTIC contemporary art centre can be considered as a 'public space'. The way in which BALTIC has been designed, managed and regulated with specific, but sometimes alternative, visions of 'the public' in mind has been discussed. That the building of BALTIC is a local industrial heritage site was an attempt to locate the building within the history of the 'local public'. However, the way in which the building is perceived and experienced by individual members of 'the public' is diverse and by no means entirely dependent upon form. The change in function of the building has led to the need to remarket BALTIC as an accessible institution – not only physically, but also socially and culturally. The barriers presented by an arts-specialist and high culture institution are not as impenetrable as some argue, however, the provision of a space through the opportunities of cultural planning, as opposed to public demand, has raised a particular set of challenges. That BALTIC is a publicly-funded institution with a responsibility to the 'local public', who did not create the demand for an arts centre, is one that is particularly acute.

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<sup>130</sup> Time (or rather lack of it) is often cited as the prime reason for non-attendance, even above cost/finance, and therefore convenience and proximity to residence and work place, as well as efficient and reliable transport access, are predeterminants of capturing and maintaining audiences for the arts (Evans, 2001: 118).



The way in which the building of BALTIC contains material, symbolic, ideational and experiential qualities means that its form is not a stable entity, but something which is (re)produced through human mediation. Different members of the public therefore encounter the physicality of BALTIC, its materiality, in different ways. The same is true for the activities and facilities provided through and at BALTIC. The needs, desires, interests and social, cultural and financial capital of an individual all effect people's decision about whether or not to become involved with BALTIC's activities or use its facilities. However, in order to (re)produce BALTIC as a more socially accessible space, the key designers, regulators and managers of the space have put 'the public' at the centre of BALTIC's programme – providing a diverse set of displays and activities to cater for different kinds of people, from the arts specialist to young children.

The multiple models of people who constitute 'the public(s)' that BALTIC aims to serve, highlights the impossibility of targeting or even identifying all of the people that could become part of its public. What it does allow, however, is the ability to witness the ways in which 'the public' becomes conceived in very particular ways in the minds and actions of the key designers, managers and regulators of public spaces. 'Publics' do not simply exist, but become (re)produced through conceptions as well as social and spatial practices, such as in the debating of the art work at BALTIC, or through taking part in the exhibitions like that of Spencer Tunick. 'The public' and the spaces through which it is enacted and created, have the potential to be (re)produced. However, the types of agency that such (re)productions take can actually observe the fragmentation of the wider public into specialist interest groups. As illustrated through the separate activities facilitating the incorporation of different groups of the public into particular programmes, within BALTIC there appears little chance for broader public debate. This is even temporally and spatially inscribed as distinct groups often occupy very different spaces of the centre at different times. So then, does this mean that BALTIC fails as a public space or captures the changing nature of public space in the contemporary city?



## Chapter 8

### Conclusion

#### 8: Introduction

The previous chapter examined the mechanisms and practices used within the BALTIC contemporary art centre in an attempt to (re)produce it as a 'public space'. However, despite the efforts of its multiple stakeholders, BALTIC's position as a 'public space' remains highly questionable, not least because of the limited appeal of the activities it provides and the socio-spatial divides between different members of 'the public' that operate around alternative programming and consumption opportunities. Within BALTIC, just as in The Pink Triangle, relations of 'privacy' and 'publicness' circulate, allowing individuals to locate or create a public or private space for themselves, depending on their ability and desire to do so. Having worked through a set of theoretical, philosophical, empirical and policy concerns facing 'public space' within the contemporary urban realm, this chapter aims to discuss some of the key themes and arguments that have cut across the thesis.

#### 8.1: Conceptualising public space

Calling the foundational status of a term into question does not censor the use of that term. It seems to me that to call something into question, to call into question its foundational status, is the beginning of the *reinvigoration* of that term. What *can* such terms mean, given that there is no consensus on their meaning? How *can* they be mobilised, given there is no way that they can be grounded or justified in any permanent way?

(Butler, 1998: 4, emphasis in original)

This thesis has aimed to call the foundational status of the term 'public space' into question. 'Public space' has been critically analysed and shown to be a socially produced and constructed category, whose existence is reliant upon



everyday (re)productions. As opposed to being a stable, monolithic and pre-existing concept used to categorise the social world in a clearly defined and consistent way, this commonsensical notion is a realm of theoretical, philosophical, political and practical contestation. Nevertheless, an acknowledgement of the contested nature of the term has led to a proposal for its reinvigoration, to reconsider what it means and how it is constructed, as opposed to a call for its abandonment. Understandings of 'public space' play a key role in structuring the everyday contemporary urban realm, from the macro level of urban policy development to the micro level of everyday flesh and stone interactions in the city. This thesis has aimed to create a more comprehensive understanding of the way in which models of public space are (re)articulated through the mechanisms and practices adopted by designers, managers, regulators and users of the everyday city.

To begin to unpack what 'public space' means, this thesis has argued that careful consideration ought to be given to the two foundational terms structuring the concept, i.e. that of 'public' and 'space'. Chapter Four focussed specifically on the term 'public' and its interdependent relationship with 'private', highlighting how this 'grand western dichotomy' is widely used to structure and understand everyday life. However, as opposed to figuring as a single, paired opposition, the public/private distinction is organised in multiple ways, with alternative - and not always innocent - intentions. Whilst the practical and analytical problems associated with the ways in which multiple understandings of the dichotomy are often unreflexively and casually blended were accounted for, the social construction of such categories provided the focus of attention:

Spatial categories such as public and private may be more fluid than one might suppose. While the public/private divide is clearly powerful, and informs much policy and action, it is not necessarily the case that it has the purchase on everyday life that some scholars have suggested. (Blomley, 2005: 281)

'Public' and 'private' are rhetorical labels and cultural classifications, as opposed to simple and straightforward designations of societal spheres (Fraser, 1992). By examining the power relations (re)producing the labels - defining who is part of the 'public' - however, it becomes clear that space plays a key role in the structuration of power. In order to fully understand 'public space', this thesis



has attempted to rebalance the paradoxically aspatial nature of many existing accounts of public space and 'the public'.

Chapter Five aimed to explicitly spatialise the term 'public space'. It argued that in order to understand the way in which public space is structured, the socio-spatial nature of the concept must be fully accounted for. 'Public space' is a concept that is structured in space whilst simultaneously structuring space, its social and spatial elements are drawn into a symbiotic relationship:

The qualities of public space as 'public' depend not only on the forms of the space itself or on what happens with it, but on the ways that distinction between private and public is marked. What we think of as an urban public life implies a modulation of interaction along a public/private continuum. (Brain, 1997: 243)

The opportunities afforded by theories of the socio-spatial production of space as 'public' and/or 'private', means that public space must not be taken-for-granted as reflective of, and only open to, the members of specific hegemonic groups – commonly conceived as '*the* public'. Instead, this thesis called for a critical spatial model capable of accounting for the multiple and sometimes contested ways that space is produced as 'public' in the contemporary urban realm.

As developed theoretically in Chapter Five, and further elaborated empirically in Chapter Six, space is there for the taking – it can be produced in different ways by diverse groups to create alternative kinds of public spaces. Free access to a variety of open public spaces, anonymity among strangers, a diversity of persons and a fluidity of meaning are all urban conditions that support looseness. For such reasons, everyday space in the city is a 'place of desire, permanent disequilibria, and seat of the dissolution of normalities and constraints, the moment of play and of the unpredictable' (Lefebvre, 1991: 129). Henri Lefebvre's conceptual triad of spatial practice, representations of space and spaces of representation, which focuses on the perceived, conceived and lived dimensions of space, constitutes the basis for a theory in which the interplay between these dimension scan be understood in the '(social) production of (social) space' (1991: 33).



Lefebvre's conceptual triad is helpful for understanding the ways in which spaces in the city are (re)produced as 'public'. It brings together the material, mental and social elements involved in producing everyday space, acting as an abstract and hollow device, which must be enlivened through empirical endeavours. The insights of critical spatial scholars in the 35 years since Lefebvre first proposed his 'unitary theory' have deepened and broadened the terms of debate about the social production of public space. For example, Lefebvre's work pays little attention to the relationship between sexuality and space. However, as this thesis has argued, queer theorists and the empirical findings of this research illustrate the centrality of sexuality to the (re)production of user behaviour, practices and comportment in different parts of the city. Drawing on the work of queer theorists, the extent to which sexual behaviour is structured around understandings of space as 'public' and or 'private' can be explored. Equally, the proliferation of gay villages, which can be broadly conceived of as 'counterpublics', extends debates about the relationship between sexuality and the different kinds of public spaces that are produced when different bodies press upon different spaces in the city.

Looking towards the findings from the empirical investigation of the Pink Triangle, the fundamental importance of human agency and bodily performance in the (re)production of space as 'public' and/or 'private' is noted. Categories of 'public' and 'private' are re-enacted, assimilated to and challenged through bodily performance, which is always perceived in relation to the overall socio-spatial normative patterns of behaviour orchestrating that space. Lefebvre's conceptual triad strips the dominant representations of space, for example space as heterosexual, of the 'everyday' spatial practices that produce a dominant coding in and through space. Dominant codes are also social constructions and social productions, which involve a level of spatial practice to repeat and regulate hegemonic norms underpinning specific visions of 'public space'.

As Cresswell argues: 'Space and place are used to structure a normative landscape: the way in which ideas about what is right, just and appropriate is transmitted through space and place' (1996: 8). Spatial structures structure representations of the world as they are held in a taken-for-granted way. For Laclau and Mouffe (1985), meaning becomes fixed *in* and *through* the control of



space. This includes not only a control of the use of space, but also the control of the images of that space (Ruddick, 1996). The control of whether or not space is perceived, conceived and lived as 'public'. However, value and meaning are not inherent in any place - indeed; they must be created, reproduced and defended from heresy (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985).

As Durkheim and Dixon argue, the role of public space in upholding such ideologies is of paramount importance as: 'Normative ideologies are repeated in and through everyday spaces' (2001: 442). However, it is also within public spaces that dominant ideologies and the social norms that underpin them can be most fiercely contested. Mitchell develops this in his work as he goes to great lengths to show how: 'public space is the product of competing ideologies about what constitutes that space' (2003: 129). He argues, in the same vein as Lefebvre's understanding of space, that public space must be understood as 'always historically and socially contingent, even as it is politically necessary' (Mitchell, 2003: 129). Empirical investigations into how space is produced as 'public' are essential to begin to grapple with the complexity of the social production and social construction of 'public space'.

## **8.2: Public space in the contemporary urban realm**

A greater understanding of what public space 'means' to individuals, and how it can be 'mobilised' by them to describe and proscribe specific visions of what it ought to be, demands high-resolution empirical investigation. However, such investigations must be situated in relation to the relevant existing literature. Chapter Three highlighted the qualitative methodological concerns, approaches and methods used to generate the data required to develop such comprehensive and synthesised research. Whilst the limitations of carrying out primary ethnographic research were accounted for, the methods and procedures adopted in an attempt to produce rigorous research data, analysis and findings were documented.

One of the key aims of this thesis was to make the methodological process of the research transparent. This was in reaction to the increasing criticism levelled at the academic community, in which they are accused of



masquerading research as a vacuous process denying the impacts of the personal interests, circumstances and beliefs of the researcher, respondents and stakeholders incorporated into the research process (Imrie and Raco, 2003; Lees, 2004). The research methodology developed to investigate the everyday spaces of the contemporary city is revealed as a complex, non-linear process that demands reflexivity so that appropriate changes can be made to adapt to the demands of the research subject.

The case study sites were chosen due to their relevance to the topic of 'public space'. Whilst they are not intended to be representative of all urban public spaces, some of the critical challenges raised through their investigation hold broader significance. Conducting research in the contemporary urban realm posed a fundamental methodological challenge:

One of the most problematic dimensions for the researcher studying public spaces are precisely the routine, non-cognitive, embodied aspects and solidarities that they form: if they are non-cognitive, and in large part non-verbal, how can they be included within the research?  
(Latham, 2003: 1906)

By involving a range of stakeholders in this research and harnessing a multi-method approach to researching empirical sites, this thesis has grappled with the complexity of researching everyday public space. However, it is important to ensure that the methodological frameworks that we develop are capable of supporting our theoretical claims. This thesis has attempted to generate a clearer understanding of the everyday dynamics of 'lived' public space, but it is impossible to account for every process and interaction operating within, through and across these spaces. To recognise such limitations, however, is not to render the research invalid or of no use.

As highlighted in the empirical chapters of the thesis, public space is unstable, changing and evolving through time and across space. A closer examination of the critical spatial framework developed in Chapter Five, when engaged empirically, reveals that the way in which public space is produced must account for how it is designed, managed, used (or not used) and regulated. The numerous combinations of all of these dimensions in their interrelation draws any stable notion of public space into question. Within the two case



study sites, specifically in relation to sexuality and space in Chapter Six and art and public space in Chapter Seven, public space is discussed as a complex subject for analysis:

Public space is excessive. It exists in the continuous return it requires. Its excess stems both from the plurality of perspectives and projects shaping it. Such plurality constitutes both the richness of public space and the excessive freedom it affords us.

(Mensch, 2007: 40)

People interpret and use space in many different ways and, therefore, public space can mean many different things, being viewed from multiple perspectives and lived by plural and heterogeneous people. Public space is a social production, albeit with very real consequences.

The 'proper' (or dominant) code of conduct in public space, for example heteronormativity, is often made apparent and policed through hostility and even violence towards non-conformers. The regulation and repetition of dominant social norms reinscribes space in particular ways, making certain activities (and associated groups) appear 'in place' whilst leaving others 'out of place'. It is often only through the incidental or intentional transgression of these dominant patterns of behaviour that such inscriptions can be questioned and/or challenged. Through people's activities, spaces become 'loose'. Accessibility, freedom of choice and physical elements that occupants can appropriate all contribute to the emergence of a loose space, but they are not sufficient. For a site to become loose, people themselves must recognise the possibilities inherent in it and make use of those possibilities for their own ends, facing the potential risks of doing so. It is within public spaces, where definitions and expectations are less exclusive and more fluid, where there is greater accessibility and freedom of choice for people to pursue a variety of activities. As Franck and Stevens argue: 'Here is the breathing space of city life, offering opportunities for exploration and discovery, for the unexpected, the unregulated, the spontaneous and the risky' (2007: 2).

As illustrated in the empirical chapters of the thesis, space that is often conceived as 'public' does not always become the kind of loose space that Franck and Stevens propose: 'Loose space is apart from the aesthetically and



behaviourally controlled and homogenous 'themed' environments of leisure and consumption where nothing unpredictable must occur' (2007: 3). On the contrary, many of the spaces now promoted as 'public', such as the Pink Triangle and BALTIC, are in fact heavily regulated, not least through their commercialisation and sanitisation. As highlighted in Chapter Six, the performance of queer identities in venues that specifically cater for non-heterosexual groups can lead to the production of a queer space. However, gay villages are often 'themed environments', exclusionary commodified lifestyle packages, created under the urban entrepreneurial agenda and the profit driven 'place-making' strategies that they promote.

Often subordinate groups - such as youths, queers and minority ethnic people – find themselves not only socially dislocated from broader society, but also simultaneously spatially removed. The socio-spatial withdrawal of marginal groups to marginal lands, away from what is often considered as the threatening and oppressive 'normative public', challenges visions of public space as space that is open to all. Processes of withdrawal, retreat and exclusion, which dominate everyday spatial relations, question the extent to which public space functions as a distinct social realm for collective life (Iveson, 2007). Must space be accessible to all members of 'the public' to be a well functioning public space?

### **8.3: Multiple public spaces: Multiple publics**

Following Iveson (2007), it would seem that it is overly optimistic to assume that public space has been, or ever will be, openly accessible and equally attractive to all members of 'the public'. Indeed, subordinate groups can actually sometimes benefit from the exclusion of the dominant other. A number of users of the Pink Triangle believed that the (implicit and explicit) exclusion of heterosexual groups was desirable for their overall enjoyment and feeling of safety within the area. However, we must remember that all of the public spaces in which dominant and/or alternative identities are formed and performed must, at the very least, acknowledge one another, and open up their specific ways of being and/or personal politics for questioning and criticism, if 'public space' is to provide a venue and medium for 'public debate'. This open



discussion appears to be increasingly eradicated in the contemporary urban realm. Whilst this is a utopian aim, it is surely one that we must have for the future. The de-politicisation of all public space would eradicate a foundational arena in which common concerns could be discussed. If we are to fail in the provision of such open discussions then to what extent can we move towards the creation of democratic public space?

If we are to hope for the creation of spaces in which members of the public in its broadest sense can come together to discuss the contemporary issues of the day then we must protect everyone's 'right to the city' (Lefebvre, 1991). Cities comprise a variety of public spaces that are open to all and, in the best cases of urbanity, extend the right to carry out one's desired actions while recognising the presence and rights of others (Lynch, 1981; Carr et al., 1992). What Lefebvre calls the 'right to the city' encompasses the right to freedom, to individualisation, to habitat and to inhabit' (1996: 173) as well as rights to participation and appropriation. The rights and responsibilities engendered within Lefebvre's notion of the 'right to the city' can provide the guiding principles for preferred behaviour in public spaces. This is, perhaps, increasingly pertinent concerning the cultural differences that currently exist within and across our cities. If we are to move towards an 'ethic of care' (Amin, 2006), in which the differences of 'other strangers' is not merely tolerated, but engaged in discussion and contemplation on an equal footing with dominant beliefs, then public space has a crucial role to play.

As highlighted by Hajer and Reijndorp (2001), we may be moving towards an archipelago of enclaves in the structures of everyday public spaces. Users of the city selectively make their way through the landscape, lingering in the spaces in which they feel comfortable, and avoiding the spaces they do not. However, the very metaphor of the enclave highlights that there is space in between the islands of preferred and predetermined intensity – the places *between* where we live, work or play. Sophie Watson (2006) calls these spaces the areas where members of the public 'rub along'. It is by 'rubbing along' – not always in harmony - with others that we can be exposed, at least, to alternative ways of being, where different values, beliefs and concerns can be encountered. Like it or not, no matter how fast you are moving, no matter how high the level of protection and/or isolation from the crowds, encounters with



others in the everyday city, be they meaningful or insignificant, are a fact of urban life. The extent to which these encounters can be transformed into positive interactions needs to be more thoroughly considered.

#### **8.4: Public space and urban policy**

The increasing prominence of public space within British urban policy (and that of numerous Western governments) has made the need to investigate how such a term '*can* be mobilised' particularly pertinent. Chapter Two discussed the contradictory ways in which public space has been adopted as both a key tool in the development of, and an overall ambition for, the creation of the 'good city'. The neo-liberal, commercial practices driving New Labour's urban renaissance were carefully considered, and the potentially exclusionary sanitised landscapes that they could create highlighted. One issue of particular importance within prevailing policy debates is the lack of empirical research available for developing suitable *and realistic* framing visions to inspire the creation of 'liveable' cities. Whilst the problematic and unrealistic aim of creating cities that are attractive to all citizens equally is perhaps utopian, by carrying out research into how policies affect individuals in unique ways, stronger and more sensitive visions can be developed. As Lees (2004) argues, the academic community, especially urban geographers, are already conducting such empirical research, therefore, there is an urgent need deepen the connections between academic and policy circles. To a certain extent, this is already happening, but there is still a lot of room for improvement when it comes to collaborative working.

Any sustainable long-term 'strategic visions' of urban change must not overly rely on coalitions of elite groupings, as they seem to push a narrowly focused agenda of entrepreneurial regeneration (Rogers, 2005: 330). There remains a genuine need to seek out ways to encourage the local community representatives to take a more active role and gain the confidence needed to challenge the position of the 'powerful' stakeholders (Hemphill et al., 2006: 65). However, the extent to which local authorities can and do involve the public in the planning process remains an empirical question. One of the key criticisms levelled at New Labour's urban renaissance agenda is the way in which the re-



scaling of urban issues to the local level is instinctively associated, as opposed to clearly linked, with the creation of more liveable cities. Local authorities need clear guidance from central government about how to engage members of disparate 'publics' into policy development, implementation and evaluation practices. Only by incorporating the insights of diverse user groups will public spaces become more attractive to a diverse range of people.

Urban policy, at present, fails to conceptualise the complexity of socio-spatial relations (re)producing public space in the contemporary urban realm. Despite claims that it takes a 'people based approach to urban regeneration' (CABE, 2003: 12), New Labour's urban renaissance is overly design-led. New Labour must move away from static understandings of space as a container for action, and environmentally determined approaches to urban transformation, if it wants to inspire the development of successful public spaces. As Carmona argues:

To intervene successfully in the dynamic relations between people and public space, designers and managers need a theoretical form of reference and a way of working that helps them to see these relations clearly so as to manage change effectively. (2003: 247)

In the case of BALTIC, more often than not, decisions about what mechanisms and practices to put in place in order to create a 'public space' were placed in the hands of the sites key stakeholders. Whilst drawing on local and professional knowledge in the creation of specialist spaces is important, central government ought to provide public institutions with clear guidance, from best practice, about how to ensure that the facilities and services they provide can become more 'publicly accessible'. This is not to argue that the importance of contextual conditions ought to be ignored, nor that successful policies are easily transportable, but that there is room for increasing the strategic capacity of government policy by strengthening the frameworks underlying visions of sustainable, equitable and just urban transformation.

### **8.5: The end of public space?**

A good deal of the discussion about public space is conducted in terms of decline and loss. 'Have we reached then, the end of public space?' asks



Mitchell (2003: 1), drawing on his earlier work where he asked: 'Have we created a society that expects and desires only private interactions, private communications, and private politics that reserves public spaces solely for commodified recreation and spectacle?' (1995: 100). Sennett is among the most articulate and forceful proponents for the loss of relevance and power of the public in the contemporary city. In *Flesh and Stone* (1994), he concludes that the modern city has 'falsified' assertions that its people share a common interest. Public space has arguably become 'empty space, a space of abstract freedom but no enduring human connection' (Sennett, 1994: 375). There are, indeed, other proponents of such dystopian views, for example, Sack claims that public space has been emptied of much of its vitality; it has become increasingly impersonal and drained of the social meaning which it previously attached to it, diminishing its relevance to community life (1986).

As argued by Graham (2001), we need to be careful not to assume the inevitable emergence of some universal dystopia as this pessimism is unsatisfactory as well as misplaced. The belief that we are marching towards an impasse in our attempts to create 'better' public spaces seems to be the result of the framework that we employ for public space. As highlighted by Hajer and Reijndorp: 'Sometimes we approach a problem with the wrong concepts and we are therefore unable to solve certain problems' (2001: 15). While lamenting the privatisation of public space in the contemporary city, many observers have tended to romanticise its history, celebrating the past openness and accessibility of its streets, and grieving its loss (Malone, 2002). Recent critics, including Rose (1999), Deutsche (2002), bell hooks (1991) and others, have challenged the notion that a 'truly public space' ever existed, arguing that the modern urban experience, has actually always marginalised certain 'others' by virtue of gender, race or other characteristics (Ruddick, 1996: 40).

According to Robins, 'the public is a phantom' as both a space and a sphere if it is meant to signify the common good or a 'single public', the city has never been 'open to scrutiny and participation, let alone under the control of the majority' (1993: x). When concerns about exclusion are articulated through narratives of loss, they imply that public spaces used to be more inclusionary - more 'public' - before their contemporary degradation. Robbins is right to complain that: 'The appearance of the public in these historical narratives is something of a



conjuring trick', asking 'For who was the city more public than now?' (Robbins, 1993: xi). The 'publicness' that we are supposed to have lost is in fact 'phantom', never actually realised in history, but haunting our frameworks for understanding the present. Far too often, it is ambiguous and under-theorised, featuring as an afterthought to tales of exclusion and loss (Iveson, 2007).

James Carey (1995) sees calls for the revitalisation of public space as the summons to resurrect an ideal rather than an illusory attempt to recreate a mythic past, phrases such as 'the recovery of public space' do not necessarily imply that there was once, long ago, in some pristine past, an era in which the public reigned. The 'recovery of public life' is not an attempt to recapture a period, historical moment, or condition but, instead, to invigorate a conception, illusion, or idea that had once had the capacity to engage the imagination, motivate action, and serve an ideological purpose (Stevenson, 1998: 201). It is not so much that public space has come to an end, but that it has never been fully understood, it is changing and mutating just as it always has - as society and sociospatial relations are changing.

A contemporaneous example of the way in which public spaces are said to be changing can be exemplified in the proliferation of what are commonly called 'e-publics'. Sheller has argued that:

New forms of mobility, new technologies of communication, and the infrastructures that support them are reconfiguring public and private life such that there are new modes of public-in-private and private-in-public that disrupt commonly held spatial models of these two separate 'spheres'.  
(2004: 39)

As Iveson (2007) notes, such claims underplay the complexity of the relations between 'new' and 'old' public space. Iveson argues that while many kinds of 'public space' exist, none exists in isolation - rather, these spaces develop and mutate in complex relations to each other. 'New forms do not replace 'old' but draw them into new combinations' (Iveson, 2007: 11). The way in which the boundaries between 'public' and 'private' spaces of contemporary life have been blurred hints at the way in which public and private can be thought of as relations that play out in, through and across space. It seems as though the boundaries between 'publicness' and 'privateness' need to be reconsidered,



perhaps, further elaborated and made more flexible, to provide a more nuanced understanding of these increasingly complex socio-spatial relations and practices.

Public space has not come to an end. It is, as it always has been, changing. Still, the rate at which it is becoming increasingly exclusionary, as commercial imperatives become encroachments upon its 'looseness', justifies the intense concern about its current state and future potential. We ought to be concerned about the changing nature of public space in the city. However, such concerns would do well to avoid slipping back into heady nostalgic images of a Greek *agora* that was purportedly once open to all. Such images are false and grossly misrepresented. We would do better to move towards a fuller understanding of the state of our present public spaces, and gain insights from places where public spaces are functioning particularly successfully e.g. Bilbao and Barcelona. However, we cannot simply import design initiatives from these areas and make them concrete structures, as the contextual circumstance in which space is located will matter hugely. Only by accounting for locality will improvements be made to it through transformation.

In cities around the world, people use a variety of public spaces to relax, to protest, to buy and sell, to experiment and to celebrate. We ought to appreciate the many ways that urban residents and visitors, with creativity and determination, appropriate public space to meet their own needs and desires. Familiar or unexpected, spontaneous or planned, momentary or long-lasting, the activities that make urban space loose continue to give cities life and vitality. One common trend that we are witnessing at present is that common fates, as opposed to shared values, appear to be (re)producing spaces of the city for collective action. It is the protests against the government's decisions in relation to war in Iraq, and many of the infringements upon human rights under its war on terror campaign, that have recently enlivened the public spaces of the city. However, we are also witnessing a new phenomenon of flash mobs – where groups of youths who have met on the internet meet in the public spaces of cities and stage non-violent sit ins as an effort to reclaim the streets – if only for a short space of time and in a trivial way.



So public spaces are not purely a limited set of territorial domains, they cannot simply be topographically identified on a map. Public spaces are made and (re)made in the image of alternative visions. They need to be (re)created through action and practice, through bodily performance and socio-spatial mediation. They may have material forms and particular functions such as the converted BALTIC flourmill; however, they may also exist in cyber space as online web forums whose configuration is continuously in flux. As opposed to considering public space as physical space in which the general public come together for the common good, it ought to be considered as the coalescence of divergent ideational, symbolic and physical relations. What makes space public and open for one person may make it isolating and oppressive for another – as revealed in Chapter Six in relation to the closet in structuring many queer lives. We need to appreciate the multiple ways in which relations of ‘publicness’ and ‘privacy’ operate in, through and across different spaces in various ways to fully appreciate the complexity of public space. Public space is constantly changing and we would do well to monitor and evaluate these changes as despite being spatially inscribed such changes are more often than not socio-spatially produced. In short, my conception of ‘public space’ is a socio-spatial construct whose heterogeneity and continuous evolution reflects empirical reality.

## **8.6: Policy recommendations**

To conclude, this section outlines a series of policy recommendations that stem directly from the empirical findings of this research. These recommendations formed the basis for a 1000-word Executive Summary Report, which was submitted to the Department for Communities and Local Government on completion of this thesis. Drawing on models of best practice - as identified through the Pink Triangle and BALTIC - the suggestions can be broken down into ten key points. However, before moving on to make a series of suggestions, it is important to acknowledge that New Labour has successfully placed the condition of our urban realms at the forefront of government policy (Cochrane, 2007). In turn, it has been instrumental in improving the quality of public space and the level of debate and discussion about its significance to democratic urbanism.



New Labour ought to be applauded for positive changes that it has made to the urban policy, and (in some cases) urban living. However, like most governments, the British government still has a long way to go in creating a strong and sustainable vision of public space, and a set of delivery practices that are capable of producing public spaces that have the potential of achieving the democratic urbanism that many of us hope for. This thesis argues that future attempts to improve the quality of urban public space would benefit from carefully considering the following issues:

1. **Conceptualising ‘public space’:** Within national policy – like academic and popular discourses -, ‘public space’ is used with more frequency than precision. Urban policy must carefully consider the conceptualisation of ‘public space’ underpinning policy frameworks. Policy-makers need to critically discuss what ‘public space’ actually means, and make their understandings transparent within national guidance. This would aid in developing a clearer model of ‘public space’, which designers, managers, regulators and owners could use when attempting to deliver these key policy outcomes. In order to achieve this, there must be ongoing debate amongst the key stakeholders of public space (including users) to identify the most suitable framing visions and ideals underpinning notions of ‘good public space’.
2. **Public engagement and participation in policy:** Urban policy must address the ambiguous role of ‘the public’ and ‘local communities’ in delivering the urban renaissance, and public space more broadly. Urban professionals need to be trained to be able to maintain sustained engagement with diverse members of ‘the public’, to ensure that they can be incorporated into the policy process in meaningful ways. This means not simply engaging members of the public in mere tick-box procedures about what developments will be built in the local area, but also considering how to include their (sometimes conflicting) visions, hopes, and desires into early consultative processes. We need to know what the public have to offer, and say, about suitable framing visions of what public space should be, and how such spaces can be delivered. This will also involve training the public and restoring confidence in their ability to contribute to the policy-making, implementation and evaluation processes.
3. **Questioning the inherent qualities of public space and accounting for locality:** Urban policy must avoid automatically assuming that ‘public space’ can achieve ‘social cohesion’ and improve ‘quality of life for all’, and think about how these qualities can be encouraged through the spatial and



social programming policies that are implemented within and across 'public spaces'. This will involve understanding how macro processes, such as urban policy, interact with micro processes, such as everyday use, to discover how specific kinds of 'public space' are produced in different locales. As the case study of BALTIC showed, only by understanding how policies such as the urban renaissance are driven out in specific locations - with any associated contextual dilemmas, restrictions and opportunities - can public spaces build a space and programme that is accessible and attractive to a diverse public.

**4. Public spaces for all?:**

Urban policy must recognise the complexity of delivering 'public space' that is welcoming and accessible to all citizens. Urban professionals must be mindful that different members of disparate publics interpret, negotiate and use 'public space' in different ways. As the Pink Triangle case study highlighted, some citizens occupy a marginal position within society, and therefore need alternative public spaces from which to explore their identities and exert spatial and social claims to the city. It is not simply that all public spaces (such as BALTIC or the Pink Triangle) will not be attractive to all citizens, but that sometimes it can be beneficial for marginal groups to have their own spaces, where the exclusions harboured in more open public spaces may be overcome (even if only temporarily).

**5. Public space as a site of discussion and debate:**

In relation to the above point, it is important that urban public space continues to provide a possible platform for citizens to come together and discuss and debate their concerns. Public space today, as it arguably always has been, is a space, which is used to question authority (such as the demonstrations against the British government's decision to go to war in Iraq), and raise common concerns (such as the infringement of human rights of terrorist suspects). If we want to create democratic urban realms, public space must continue to function as a key site through which citizens can (on-line, in person, in writing etc) engage in the discussion and debate of significant contemporary issues and personal injustices.

**6. Questioning market forces in the development of public space:**

There must be the opportunity, and commitment, to question the market forces that are being given the carte blanche to deliver public space under the urban renaissance. As we see increasing trends towards the privatisation, commodification and securitisation of public spaces within our towns and cities, policy makers must be critical of the opportunities that such spaces provide for improving citizens quality of life, economic sustainability and social inclusion. This is not to say that we should



remove the private sector from 'public space' development. Rather, the government should involve market drivers in discussions about the kinds of public space that they are delivering. This is working well in some instances, but we must question market forces, which are more often than not orientated towards profitability, carefully if we hope to create more accessible public spaces.

**7. Long-term commitment to public space improvement:**

Designers, regulators and managers of urban realms must have a long-term commitment to the delivery of 'public spaces'. This means avoiding seeing the development of 'public space' as an end in itself and, instead, thinking about what we can discover from the development process. This will involve learning from past mistakes made locally e.g. the poor-quality urban design of the Times Square wind tunnel in the Pink Triangle, which makes it an uninviting 'public space', and the mistakes of others. It will also involve looking to models of best practice from local areas and elsewhere (in the way that BALTIC's Founding Committee looked towards the successful TATE Modern in London and Guggenheim in Bilbao, when creating a vision for the institutions physical design and artistic programme). Focussing on models of best practice will require British professionals to engage with their European counterparts. This is already happening to some extent, but sustained engagement is needed if we are to achieve the best possible results. Urban authorities must also pay attention to routine maintenance and cleaning issues involved in maintaining good public spaces, in order to ensure that once public spaces are developed they do not fall into disrepair. This will involve setting local action plans whereby the responsibility for public space is clearly allocated to particular Directorate(s) or Working Groups.

**8. Interdisciplinary and multiple stakeholder engagement in urban policy:**

There is a need for a better relationship between the academic, professional and policy communities. However, this will involve the training of, and extended discussions between, all stakeholders, to ensure that we are working together – as opposed to within vocational silos. As academics, we need to make sure that we use our research to its full potential when it comes to policy relevance. This means that policymakers and academics must liaise with one another to ensure that they are working together in attempts to improve public space. It will also involve academic working across disciplinary boundaries, and creating genuine interdisciplinary research, which can take on board the planning, social, theoretical and practical issues raised in developing successful public spaces.



## **9. Avoid and overly design-led approach to public space improvement:**

New Labour has successfully highlighted the importance of good urban design in the creation of successful public space. Whilst this is a welcomed addition to urban planning processes, the approach is overly design-led. The government, through bodies such as CABE and CABE Space, need to more carefully consider the 'human dimension' of public space, and the ways in which spaces press upon different bodies in different ways (Probyn, 1995). We must not divorce the spatial city from the social city, but should think of how the two come together in the everyday city. As the case study of the Pink Triangle demonstrated, to begin to understand flesh and stone interactions in public space, the ideational, material, symbolic and practical dimensions of public space need to be taken into consideration. People exert a human agency and have individual circumstances, needs and desires. Public space, therefore, will not always be used in the ways that urban designers intend. Nevertheless, urban design can go some way in designing specific activities (and associated people) in or out of those spaces. As this is the case, urban policy must be mindful of the kinds of 'rights to the city' (Lefebvre, 1996) that are encouraged - intentionally or otherwise - by particular urban designs.

## **10. A call for more evidence-based empirical research:**

Urban professionals should continue to demand more evidence-based empirical research into the condition and nature of everyday public space. This thesis makes some interventions into understanding the multidimensional nature of everyday public space. It joins the work of others, discussed throughout this thesis, in adding to the evidence base that we as researchers, academic, and practitioners alike need to develop our understandings of, and in turn, improve the public spaces of our urban realms. If we are to move towards the openly accessible public spaces that many of us hope for, it is important that we continue to carry out research into issues surrounding public space. As social scientists face increasing criticism for the gulf between policy concerns and their scholarly pursuits, it is time to consider the value of conducting research that is theoretically informed, empirically grounded and policy relevant. Research based on the everyday city demands that all of these dimensions be taken into account and carefully considered.

As public space mutates and evolves over time – in both its physical form, and social function - understanding its role and potential within the urban realm will remain a significant issue facing contemporary society. It is with this in mind that I want to restate the importance of this thesis in beginning to unpack some of the critical challenges facing academics, policymakers, designers, regulators, managers and users who have some interest or stake in public space. By



producing insights into the notion and condition of public space within contemporary urban living, policy and thought, I hope that this thesis sheds some light on academic, popular and policy debates circulating around public space. However, and more importantly, there is still a long way to go in fully understanding what public space is, and what it can achieve, for an increasingly diverse urban citizenry.



Appendix 1: Outline of Original Proposal

POSTGRADUATE TRAINING DIVISION ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RESEARCH COUNCIL POLARIS HOUSE NORTH STAR AVENUE SWINDON SN2 1UJ  TEL: (01793) 413141	<b>APPLICATION FOR AN ESRC/ODPM STUDENTSHIP</b>  Original plus 10 copies to be returned to ESRC postmarked 28 March 2003 NO FAXES WILL BE ACCEPTED  <b>ODPM 2003</b>
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SECTION 1      To be completed by the principal applicant

1      Principal applicant: Dr Gordon MacLeod

ESRC Recognition Reference Number: 

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Name of Institution: University of Durham

Department Name: Department of Geography

Address: Science Laboratories, South Road, Durham. DH1 3LE

Contact name: Dr Gordon MacLeod      Tel: (0191) 334 1915      Name of proposed supervisor: Dr Gordon MacLeod and Dr Kurt Iveson

2

To be completed by the applicant (lead supervisor)	
I confirm that this application is made with my full knowledge and approval. I accept the conditions set out in the accompanying notes on ESRC/ODPM Studentships.	
Name: Gordon MacLeod	
Signed:	Position held: Lecturer

To be completed by the Head of Department or equivalent	
I confirm that this application is made with my full knowledge and approval. Should a studentship be awarded this academic department accepts the arrangements for students as set out in the accompanying notes on ESRC/ODPM Studentships.	
Name: Professor Ash Amin	
Signed:	Position held: Head of Department

To be completed by the Registrar's Office	
I confirm that this application is made with the full knowledge and approval of the University authorities. Should a studentship be awarded the University accepts the arrangements for students as set out in the accompanying notes on ESRC/ODPM Studentships.	
Name:	
Signed:	Position held:



*Please return completed application form (and 10 copies) by 28 March 2003 to:*

Lyndy Griffin, Postgraduate Training Division, Economic and Social Research Council, Polaris House, North Star Avenue, Swindon SN2 1UJ, Tel: 01793 413141

SECTION 2

3a) Please indicate which ODPM topic area this application relates to (see *Project description, Guidance Notes for applicants, ESRC/ODPM Studentships 2003*)

Maintaining and managing high quality housing, neighbourhoods and public space

3b) Please enter the ESRC 'Subject Area' appropriate to this project:

Human Geography

3c) Please indicate whether or not the proposed project is relevant to the ESRC themes by inserting the identifying number of relevant themes in the boxes below or ticking the 'no overall theme' box (see *Notes for Completion of Form 'ODPM 2003'* - *Guidance Notes for applicants, ESRC/ODPM Studentships*)

Primary theme  
Government and  
Citizenship

Secondary theme  
Social stability and  
exclusion

No overall theme



PROPOSED PROJECT TITLE:  
.....  
..... Fashioning High Quality Public Spaces: Some Critical Challenges

4 Outline of proposed project.

Please give a full description of the proposed project, structuring your proposal to include the following information: Title; Aims; Background; Relevance to policy; Plan of action, including design and methods; Contribution to policy, knowledge and development of methods. You should also incorporate the anticipated outcomes of the research, highlighting the academic as well as the policy relevant benefits envisaged. Do not attach additional material in reply to this question. Please note that the maximum length of the project description should not exceed the 2 pages provided and the font size used should ensure that details are clearly legible (e.g. 11pt. type or larger). You are strongly advised to refer to the *Guidance Notes for applicants, ESRC/ODPM Studentships 2003* before completing this section.

**Aims**

This project aims to identify and examine the mechanisms and practices through which models of ‘good’ urban public space are constructed in the contemporary (re-) design, regulation and management of towns and cities in England. This examination will proceed through four case studies, which have been selected to explore competing definitions of ‘the public’ and to inform debates about who belongs to particular types of public space at particular times.

**Objectives**

1. To advance current thinking on strategies to improve the quality of urban public space in England’s towns and cities by:
  - a) Analyzing methods through which these strategies in the creation and management of public spaces can be sensitive to the diverse publics that populate the bustling, multicultural city;
  - b) Assessing the nature of the relationship between public spaces, local neighbourhoods and communities, and the wider urban environment within which they are situated.
2. To address the conceptual confusion that characterizes current definitions of and approaches to public space, by critically elaborating on the diverse ways that the term is mobilised in various academic and policy related contexts.

**Context**

Recent years have seen an increasingly powerful case being made for improvements in the quality of everyday urban spaces. The relationship between public space, quality of life, economic competitiveness and social cohesion has been articulated in a variety of important policy related contexts, including: the Urban Taskforce’s *Towards an Urban Renaissance*, and government policy (DTLR 2001; ODPM 2003). This latter document announces the formation of a new unit in April 2003 – CAFE Space – which will “champion high quality planning, design, and the management and care of parks and public spaces, and will provide hands-on support to local authorities and others to apply best practice to improve the local environment and reduce the fear of crime”.

There would thus appear to be widespread agreement about the importance of making improvements to public space. There is, however, considerably less agreement about how these improvements can be achieved and what they might entail. This uncertainty is being reflected in what has become a lively and important debate in contemporary urban scholarship. A range of urban theorists have voiced concerns about the conceptual clarity and integrity with which the term ‘public space’ is deployed in both policy and academic literature, not least in that different models of ‘good public space’ are being mobilised by different actors and interest groups. But these models are often premised on incompatible assumptions; their portability across different urban terrains is thereby questionable (Iveson 1998). In this regard, fashioning high quality public spaces out of the various models on offer leaves policy practitioners confronting a range of critical challenges in the design, management and regulation of public spaces.



## Case Study

Four case studies have been proposed to explore a set of critical challenges that have been identified in contemporary debates on public space. Each will examine the means by which shared perspectives may (or may not) emerge across interest groups and communities who are endeavouring to fashion certain public spaces with particular uses in mind. We envisage the final shape of these case studies being established in consultation with ODPM and the successful applicant.

### 1. City Centre Public Spaces: Exchange and Use Values (Sheffield)

One key question that has emerged in recent debates concerns the extent to which newly fashioned city centre spaces are designed 'for the many or the few', especially with regard to income, ethnicity, class, gender and age and how these translate into various use and exchange value motivations. Sheffield offers a very interesting case study through its £120 million 'Heart of the City' project, which has seen the establishment of Peace Gardens, Winter Garden, Millennium Galleries, pedestrianisation, Supertram, routes to train station, and city centre wardens.

### 2. Residential neighbourhood public spaces: shared community values, 'anti-social behaviour' and 'stranger danger' (Newcastle/Gateshead)

It is often hoped that the everyday contacts and exchanges which occur in public spaces such as parks and play areas might allow for positive experiences of sociability and facilitate the formation of shared community values. A range of measures have recently been proposed to help curb so-called 'nuisance' or 'anti-social' behaviour, which are thought to contribute to a decline in the usage of, and participation in creating, local public spaces (ODPM 2003; Home Office 2003). To explore these debates, a public space in a residential neighbourhood in the Newcastle/Gateshead area will be selected for study, with a view to investigating the use of measures such as anti-social behaviour contracts and neighbourhood wardens to improve the quality and experience of the space in question.

### 3. Transient Public Spaces: mobility and citizenship (Kings Cross Station)

Design and management often take for granted the existence of a stable 'local community' of users who might participate in discussions about the design of public spaces and represent the predominant group on behalf of whom spaces are managed. Nonetheless, a range of public spaces have a much more transient or mobile user population and this 'mobile citizenry' (Urry 2000) presents another set of challenges to policy makers, designers and regulators. The redevelopment of Kings Cross station in London provides an excellent case study through which to investigate this.

### 4. Civic public spaces: memory, representation and belonging (Williamson Park, Lancaster)

Finally, some public spaces have a role to play in representing the public, through memorials and monuments which sustain memories of key historical events and figures, and/or through spaces which symbolise the polity and fulfil civic functions (Sennett 1973). Such spaces often play a significant role in the local economy and offer places of sociability for locals and tourists alike. One possible example is Williamson Park, Lancaster, which was in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to act as a monument of civic pride and today is one of the key attractions in this historic city, hosting outdoor promenades and other cultural events.

## Methods and Programme of Work

Months 1-9: review literature on public space, urban politics, and UK urban policy in order to develop their conceptual approach and to further identify and clarify themes for empirical study.

Months 10-12: the student will develop the appropriate methodology and select contacts the four case studies. Months 13-24: intensive field work in the four case study areas. Months 25-36: the student will finalize the data analysis and complete the thesis, and present findings.

The methods to be deployed are: *Documentary Analysis* of the planning process to enable an understanding of political context of each public space and the roles of key interest groups and stakeholders in this. A *Quantitative Survey* will enable a working knowledge of the key user groups of each of the public spaces and help in identifying suitable interviewees. *Media Analysis* will provide an assessment of relevant debates and controversies over the design and management of the public spaces.

*Participant Observation* will deepen the understanding of the key user groups by revealing their



practices and behaviours within each public space and, where, relevant, conflict and contestation over the use of such space. Finally, *In-depth Interviews* with planners and various user groups (businesses, neighbourhood residents, tourists, subcultural groups) will enable the student to gain a deeper sense of the potentially divergent views about who has a right to the various public spaces and how this is being managed and negotiated within each different case.

**Output and Impact**

The project will lead to an 80,000 word dissertation leading to the publication of up to three articles in internationally refereed journals within the sphere of urban studies and/or a monograph for a leading academic publisher. The material will also be disseminated to academics through international conferences, to networks of policy professionals enabled through ICRRDS (e.g. the Annual Regeneration Management workshop), and to ODPM and CABE.

SECTION 3

5 Academic Supervisor(s) details

	Name of supervisor	Position held	Total number of students currently supervised
Principal Supervisor	Gordon MacLeod	Lecturer in Geography	... .. 2... ..
Other supervisor(s)	Kurt Iveson	Lecturer in Geography	... .. 1... ..
	.....	.....	.....
	.....	.....	.....

6 Please give information on recent work by and relevant expertise of the academic supervisor(s). Please support your answer by identifying the last three relevant publications of the supervisor(s).

**Gordon MacLeod’s** current research interests are on the geography and political economy of cities (Leverhulme grant 2000-2001 on *Public Space in Urban Britain*), regional politics and identity, and the changing nature of the state (co-edited book for Blackwell, 2003). In 2003 he is conducting an ODPM funded research project entitled “Privatizing the City”, which analyzes the impact of gated communities, city gentrification, and edge city developments upon the urban economic, social and political fabric.

MacLeod G, Raco M and Ward K (2003) ‘Negotiating the contemporary city’, *Urban Studies*, forthcoming  
MacLeod G (2002) ‘From urban entrepreneurialism to a revanchist city? On the spatial injustices of Glasgow’s Renaissance’, *Antipode* 34:3 pp. 602-24  
MacLeod G and Ward K (2002) ‘Spaces of Utopia and Dystopia: Landscaping the Contemporary City’ *Geografiska Annaler* 84B, 41-57

**Kurt Iveson’s** main research focus is on the production of urban public spaces. His PhD research investigated conflicts over public space in Australian cities, providing empirically grounded theoretical reflections on the meanings of public space. He is also interested in contemporary British urban policy and its implications for citizenship and politics. In 2004, he will be conducting ODPM funded research on “The meaning of ‘liveability’ and the urban public realm” (see section 9 below).



Holden A and Iveson K (2003) 'Designs on the Urban: New Labour's Urban Renaissance and the Spaces of Citizenship', *City*, forthcoming.

Iveson K (2003-4) 'Justifying Exclusion: McIvers Ladies Baths, Sydney, and the meanings of public space', *Gender Place and Culture*, forthcoming.

Iveson, K. (1998) "Putting the public back into public space" in *Urban Policy and Research*, 16 (1): 21-33.

7 Where the principal academic supervisor will be responsible for more than three students please provide an explanation of how workloads will be managed to provide adequate supervision levels.

8 Each student will have an associate supervisor in a relevant field based at ODPM. Please outline the form of contact you and the student will find helpful and how such contact will be maintained.

The normal practice is that students at Durham Geography meet their supervisors fortnightly. All meetings are recorded and discussion is based on pre-circulated documents outlining action plans, research strategies or the form of draft chapters or conference presentations. It is anticipated that draft chapters, conference papers and formally assessed papers will be circulated to the associate supervisor in ODPM, in order that she/he can be kept up to date with progress and given the opportunity to comment. In year 1, a face-to-face meeting with all concerned would be desirable. It would also be desirable for the associate supervisor to attend a meeting in May when students are assessed for progression into year 2. In year 2, the department would anticipate the student to maintain direct contact with the associate supervisor during field work, with the latter offering advice on policy relevant issues and in gaining institutional access (e.g. for planning meetings) in the four case studies. Throughout year 3, the department would expect input from ODPM to be important in commenting on drafts chapters, key research findings, advice on dissemination to user groups, and the policy implications of the research.

9 Please give details of any previous experience of collaboration with government departments or other non-academic research users (e.g. research contracts, continuing seminar participation or related contributions).

Both Drs MacLeod and Iveson have experience of collaboration with user groups, government departments, and community groups. Dr MacLeod's PhD research involved regular contact with government departments in Scotland and his Leverhulme project has involved negotiations with city councils, the Scottish Executive and community groups. Dr Iveson has some years of employment experience in community-based youth service provision in Australia, and his PhD research involved regular contact with a wide range of community groups and government agencies involved in the design and management of Australian public spaces. He recently provided written and verbal evidence to the London Assembly concerning graffiti policy (2002), ran a 'fringe event' at the Urban Summit in Birmingham, and has conducted consultancy research for the Australian Capital Territory Department of Children, Youth and Family Services (1997), the Australian Capital Territory Department of Health and Community Care (1997), the Youth Coalition of the Australian Capital Territory (1998), and the Young Women's Christian Association of Canberra (1999). Links with the ODPM are now extensive and being deepened through a recently negotiated suite of projects with ICRRDS here at Durham and to be conducted throughout 2003-05. MacLeod is investigator on "Privatizing the City: Towards Postmetropolis?" and will be writing an ODPM report in the late summer of 2003. Iveson



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is investigator on “The meaning of ‘liveability’ and the urban public realm”, and will be writing a report for ODPM in 2004.

- 10 These awards are intended to develop well rounded researchers. Please specify how both specific (related to their research topic) and broader research training (beyond the needs of the topic) will be met for the selected student.

Training will be provided in a generic and customized form following discussion between student and supervisors. General training requirements that the student has not gained in previous studies will be delivered via the MA in Research Methods (geography) for which we have received ESRC recognition. More specific and/or advanced training that relates to the particular needs of this project will be delivered on a customized basis by the supervisors and/or other staff in the university, following an evaluation of the capabilities of the student selected. If appropriate, training in policy issues and procedures as well as in writing for a policy audience and the media could be provided through ODPM.

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## Appendix 2: List of Interviewees

Albert, gay man, 54, 2005, in PT

Alistair Balls, Chief Executive of CfL, 2005, in CfL

Allessandro Vincentelli, Curator at B., 2005, in B.

Brenda, lesbian, 42, 2005, in PT

Carlos, gay man, 25, 2005, in PT

Cathryn Rowley, Head of Marketing at B., 2005, in B.

Christie, B. Crew Member, 2005, in B.

Christopher, gay man, 20, 2005, in PT

Dave Croft, Urban Designer for NCC, 2005, in NCC

Dave, male, white, local resident, 20, 2005, in B.

David Usher, Newcastle City Centre Manager, 2005, in NCC

Denise, lesbian, 32, 2005, in PT

Emily, lesbian, 24, 2005, in PT

Emma Thomas, Head of Formal Education at B., 2005 in B.

Frank, gay man, 32, 2005, in PT

Gary Watts, Head of Cultural Regeneration for Gateshead Council, 2005, in GC

Gary, male, white, national resident, 38, 2005, in B.

Geoff, male, white, regional resident, 34, 2005, in B.

George, male, white, county resident, 63, 2006, in B.

Grace, lesbian, 23, 2005, in PT

Gregg Stone, NCC Executive Member, 2005, in NCC

Helen, female, white, regional resident, 35, 2005, in B.

Helen, lesbian, 22, 2005, in PT

Iven, gay man, 23, 2005, in PT

Jill, female, white, national resident, 33, 2006, in B.

Judy Watts, Head of Community Education at B., 2005, in B.

Julia, lesbian, 26, 2005, in PT

Lucy, female, white, local resident, 26, 2005, in B.

Mary, female, white, regional resident, 52, 2006, in B.

Mike Crilley, Urban researcher, CABE, 2005, in B.

Noel Jackson, Head of Education for CfL, 2005, in CfL



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Peter Howe Head of Planning at NCC, 2005, in NCC

Rebecca Stevenson–Read, Head of Visitor Services at B., in B.

Ronald van der Somple, Curator at B., 2005 in B.

Shauna, lesbian, 19, 2005, in PT

Simon Brooks, Special Projects Officer for NCC, 2005, in Durham University

Stephen, male, white, local resident, 26, 2005, in B.

Steve, B. Crew Member, 2005, in B.

Tim Townsend, Lecturer Newcastle University, 2005, in Newcastle University

Tony Wyatt, NCC Town Planner, 2005, in NCC

Trevor, male, white, regional resident, 43, 2005, in B.



### Appendix 3: A sample interview guide

#### David Usher, Newcastle City Centre Manager, 11/11/2005

- What does your role involve? How long have you been in it?
- To what extent is it important to have a city centre manager?
- What are your main concerns as city centre manager? Why?
- Which authorities and bodies do you work with/alongside? NCC/GC?
  
- To what extent are you involved in the considerations of public space?
- What do you think are the most important attributes and qualities of public space?
- To what extent do you think that Newcastle provides quality public spaces?
- Are there any particular public spaces in Newcastle that you feel are particularly successful?
- To what extent do you think that the public spaces in Newcastle have changed in recent years? How are they going to change in future years?
  
- To what extent are the general public of Newcastle considered in the management of the city centre? Its public spaces?
- To what extent are the public spaces of Newcastle accessible to all members of the public? Should they be?
- Are any members of the public excluded from the public spaces of Newcastle? Which members? How? Why?
- To what extent should the public of Newcastle be considered in the conception and development of public spaces?
  
- Who are the main individuals, bodies and organisations informing and carrying out public space developments? What impact does this have?
- To what extent does the development of public space depend upon the investment of public bodies?
- To what extent are your recommendations and decisions around managing Newcastle informed by recent ODPM, CAGE or DEMOS documents?
- To what extent does the design of specific areas affect the ease with which they can be managed? How? Why?
- To what extent should public spaces be design-led? User- led?
  
- To what extent is it important to have a clear rationale for the development of a city centre for it to be successful?
- To what extent are the connections between public spaces and the broader areas of the city important?
- What are the key aims and objectives underlying the development and running of Newcastle?
- To what extent does Newcastle differ from other city centres? How? Why? Is it important to be different?
- Are there any specific city centres which Newcastle could look to for inspiration in the development of successful public spaces? Where? Why?
  
- Any specific information on BALTIC site?
- Any specific information on the LIFE area?
  
- Any other people I should contact?
- Any other people I should interview?
  
- Is there anything else that you would like to add?



#### Appendix 4: The differences between post-modern and modern architecture

1. In reaction to modernism's clean break with the past and regarding of the future as a model = Historicism; historical quotation; an architecture of memory and monuments; the search for urbanity (in its pre-industrial incarnation).
2. In reaction to decontextualism, internationalism, models, neutrality, razing and flattening sites; the International style = Contextualism; importance of site or place; regionalism; vernacular design; pluralism; a search for 'character', urban identity, unique features, visual references, creation of landmarks, genius loci, and urban legibility; populism.
3. In reaction to totalising rationality, functionalism, Taylorism, the machine metaphor (mode of production as model for the city and for architectural practice), 'Less is more', 'Form follows function', technological 'honesty', separation of functions (the city divided into its constituent parts) = use of symbolism (with that being its only function), ornament, superfluous elements, wit, whimsy; the metaphors of collage, bricolage, assemblage, text or simply older cities (Vidler's 'third typology'); emphasis on human scale (the human figure re-enters the design); 'More is more'; 'Form follows fiasco'; no zoning or 'mixed use zoning'.
4. In reaction to the political agenda of the Modern movement, the utopian belief that new architecture will engender a new and more egalitarian society along with the desire to bring this (assuming environmental determinism), the belief in salvation through design, the belief in a perfectable world, the search for truth and purity, faith in a linear progress, faith in science and reason, faith in technocratic solutions, a certainty and hubris among architects and planners = Apoliticism, humility, a lack of faith and a search for something to believe in; an anti-utopianism; belief perhaps in 'vest pocket utopias' or 'heterotopias'.
5. From anti-capitalism, egalitarianism, a reliance on State authority and large-scale interventions, democratic socialisms = to anti-autocratic; anti-authoritarian; small-scale plans; or, if the intervention is large, collage-like using a number of architects and a design guide; participation of users or at least an effort to accommodate people rather than change them; a favouring of political decentralisation and non-interference from the central State authority, liberal political economy, neo-conservatism's.
6. From art as a tool for achieving political ends and the planner/architect as artist foremost - to art as a commodity and therefore not as pedagogic, but catering to consumer tastes; the planner/architect as dutiful provider, public servant, or alternatively, panderer to the rich.
7. New building types for a new egalitarian society - To return to traditional building types.
8. From shock techniques (defamiliarisation, strange-making) as a means to achieve these political ends - to familiarity, use of 'familiar' elements to make people feel immediately at home, legibility. (Ellin, 1996: 91)



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